



# TATYA TOPE

BY DR DHARM PAL

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES NEW DELHI









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# TATYA TOPE

THE HERO OF INDIA'S FIRST WAR  
OF INDEPENDENCE 1857-1859



*By*

**DR DHARM. PAL**

With a Foreword by

**DR S. RADHAKRISHNAN**

Vice-President of India

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## FOREWORD

It is possible only now, nearly a hundred years after the event, to view the Mutiny of 1857 in its proper perspective. The Government of India has therefore initiated an objective and comprehensive study of that episode, which marked a turning point in British Indian history. One of the outstanding leaders on the Indian side was the Maratha soldier Tatya Tope. His constant harassment of an enemy far superior in equipment and his skill in utilising difficult terrain in evading encirclement have gained him a recognised place in the history of guerilla warfare. Dr Dharm Pal's detailed study, based on all available published sources, of the battles and campaigns waged by Tatya Tope will be useful to all students of this period.

April 20, 1955.  
NEW DELHI

S. RADHAKRISHNAN,  
Vice-President of India.







## PREFACE

TATYA TOPE, the hero of India's First War of Independence (1857-1859), was a true patriot, a gifted general and a remarkable guerilla leader. The story of his career, so rich in colour and incident, has an epic grandeur of its own. The dramatic turn of events in the summer of 1857 brought him out of obscurity into sudden fame. The first blow for the independence of the country was struck on May 10, 1857, when the native sepoys at Meerut mutinied and marched to Delhi. Moved by a mighty impulse the people of India made a supreme effort to shake off the foreign yoke. The revolt spread with lightning rapidity like wild fire spreading in the prairies of America. Tatya Tope seized this opportunity of establishing in Cawnpore the authority of his master, Nana Sahib, the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II. He displayed considerable energy in the defence of Cawnpore, when a British force under Brigadier-General Havelock advanced from Allahabad to recapture this town of great strategic importance. Tatya Tope was defeated on July 16, 1857 and fled to Oudh, but he soon reorganised his forces and moved to Bithur, twelve miles from Cawnpore, to swoop down on Cawnpore while Havelock was engaged in the operations for the relief of the British garrison in the Lucknow Residency, which was besieged by a large nationalist force. Havelock however could not make much progress and returned to Cawnpore. He marched at the head of a large force and defeated Tatya Tope at Bithur on August 16, 1857. Although Tatya Tope suffered, a reverse yet he showed a sound grasp of tactics and his troops fought with great tenacity and grim resolution eliciting praise even from the British general. Tatya Tope was defeated but he was undismayed for he was an incorrigible optimist and never knew when he was beaten. After his repulse at



Bithur he resorted to "fresh fields and pastures new"; he transferred his activities to the territories of Maharaja Sindhia and gained a signal triumph by winning over to his side the redoubtable Gwalior Contingent—a large body of well disciplined troops. Tatya Tope was now at the head of a large army and he carried out a daring counter-stroke in November 1857. At the time when Sir Colin Campbell, the Commander-in-Chief in India, had advanced at the head of a large force to relieve the Lucknow Residency, leaving behind a small force under Major-General Windham to protect Cawnpore, Tatya Tope advanced from Kalpi, routed Windham's force and drove it back pell-mell into the entrenchment near the bridge-of-boats over the Ganges. Victory, however, eluded Tatya Tope's grasp for Sir Colin, with his force, hurried back from Lucknow and reached Cawnpore just in time to save the remnants of the garrison from annihilation. On December 6, 1857 Sir Colin Campbell by a brilliant piece of strategy smote Tatya Tope's force into twain. Although Tatya Tope was defeated he emerged with credit from defeat for he successfully extricated a large part of his force. He now reorganised his forces at Kalpi and with the help of his powerful ally, the Rani of Jhansi, consolidated his power for a trial of strength with the British force (under Sir Hugh Rose), which was advancing to clear Central India of opposition. On March 22, 1858 Sir Hugh Rose laid siege to Jhansi and by March 31, the siege operations were so far advanced as to warrant an attack on the garrison. The fortunes of the garrison were at the lowest ebb. But just at that critical moment Tatya Tope appeared from Charkhari at the head of 20,000 men to relieve Jhansi and to crush the British force, which found itself in great danger, sandwiched as it was between Tatya Tope's force and the garrison of Jhansi. If the latter had made a sortie at the same time that Tatya Tope attacked the British force, Sir Hugh Rose would have been defeated. Unfortunately for Tatya Tope, the astute British general turned the tables by taking the initiative and falling on his force before the garrison could make a



sortie. Tatya Tope's troops were defeated but again he showed admirable skill in extricating a large part of his force. Jhansi fell on April 5, 1858 but the Rani with her followers escaped to Kalpi. Tatya Tope and the Rani of Jhansi tried to check the advance of the British force at Kunch but were defeated. Tatya Tope now knew that the game was up; so he left his able lieutenants and the Rani of Jhansi to carry on the most keenly contested struggle at Kalpi while he bent all his energies in carrying out his audacious plan of seizing the rock fortress of Gwalior. He slipped in disguise into the territories of Maharaja Sindhia and won over his troops to his side. Thus it came about that while Sir Hugh Rose was congratulating his troops after the victory at Kalpi, Tatya Tope and the Rani of Jhansi entered Gwalior in triumph and proclaimed the Nana as the Peshwa. This sensational triumph thrilled the nationalist leaders all over India and dismayed the enemies. But before Tatya Tope was able to consolidate his power, he was defeated by Sir Hugh Rose and driven from Gwalior. Now began the most remarkable career of this gifted leader. For almost one year he defied all the attempts of the British columns to capture him. In the pursuit of the Will-O'the-Wisp, Tatya Tope, many a British commander came to grief. Tatya Tope always outwitted and outmanoeuvred them. Even when the net seemed to be fast closing round him he would effect a miraculous escape and by his daring initiative carry out some counter-stroke which would baffle the enemy. In his Marathon race he was never really beaten. In the end his hiding place was betrayed by one of his trusted friends. He was tried as a rebel by court-martial and hanged at Sipri on April 18, 1859.

British historians, notable among them being Colonel Malleson and Sir George Forrest, are unanimous in their opinion that Tatya Tope was the most gifted leader India produced at that crisis. A modern British historian—Percy Cross Standing—has not only included Tatya Tope amongst

the most famous guerilla leaders of the world, but has also bestowed on him the highest praise by remarking that he was "by far the biggest brain produced on the native side by the Mutiny of 1857-58. A few more like him and India had inevitably been wrested from the English." Tatya Tope displayed indeed military talent of a very high order. The story of his career, suffused with the rich glow of colour and romance, strikes a responsive chord in our hearts. Tatya Tope was indeed a true hero of India's First War of Independence (1857-1859).

Tatya Tope's glory has however been dimmed by two extraneous circumstances. Whereas the exploits of Garibaldi, the famous guerilla leader of Italy, have been described in rich and sonorous prose by Sir George Trevelyan, Tatya Tope (one of the most remarkable guerilla leaders of the world) has found no worthy biographer to chronicle his achievements. Further his fame has been eclipsed by the more dazzling triumphs of the Rani of Jhansi. The exploits of the brave Rani, who died in a blaze of glory, consecrating with her blood the cause for which she fought, have caught the popular imagination. Her countrymen have honoured her and her name has become a household word. It is an honour which she richly deserves. The name of Tatya Tope, who shook the British Empire in India to its very foundations, is however hardly known to many of his countrymen. It is only fair that an attempt should be made to rehabilitate Tatya Tope in his true glory. I am therefore presenting in bold relief the achievements of one of the bravest sons of Mother India. The story of his achievements, though based on extensive published materials, is not as comprehensive as it ought to be. I sincerely hope that some gifted historian, who feels the throb of the nationalist impulse, will delve deep into the unpublished records, and write a detailed and authentic biography of this gifted nationalist leader.

I take this opportunity of expressing my deep sense of gratitude to Dr Bisheshwar Prasad, M.A., D. Litt., Director,



## PREFACE

vii

C.I.S. Historical Section, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, for revising the manuscript and making valuable suggestions for the improvement of the book. Lastly I would like to point out that I have preferred the Maratha name Tatyā Tope to Tantiā Topi used by the British historians.

DHARM PAL

October 1957.





## CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD — <i>By</i> Dr. S. Radhakrishnan .. ..	i
PREFACE .. .. .	iii
CHAPTER I — BURSTING OF THE STORM .. ..	1
"    II — A DREAM COME TRUE .. ..	10
"    III — A GAMBLE THAT FAILED .. ..	31
"    IV — A NATION IN ARMS .. ..	54
"    V — THE MAN OF DESTINY .. ..	82
"    VI — SHIVA'S THUNDERBOLT .. ..	105
"    VII — THE TURN OF THE TIDE .. ..	124
"    VIII — TO THE RESCUE .. ..	144
"    IX — A DARING COUNTER-STROKE .. ..	173
"    X — A MARATHON RACE .. ..	194

## LIST OF MAPS

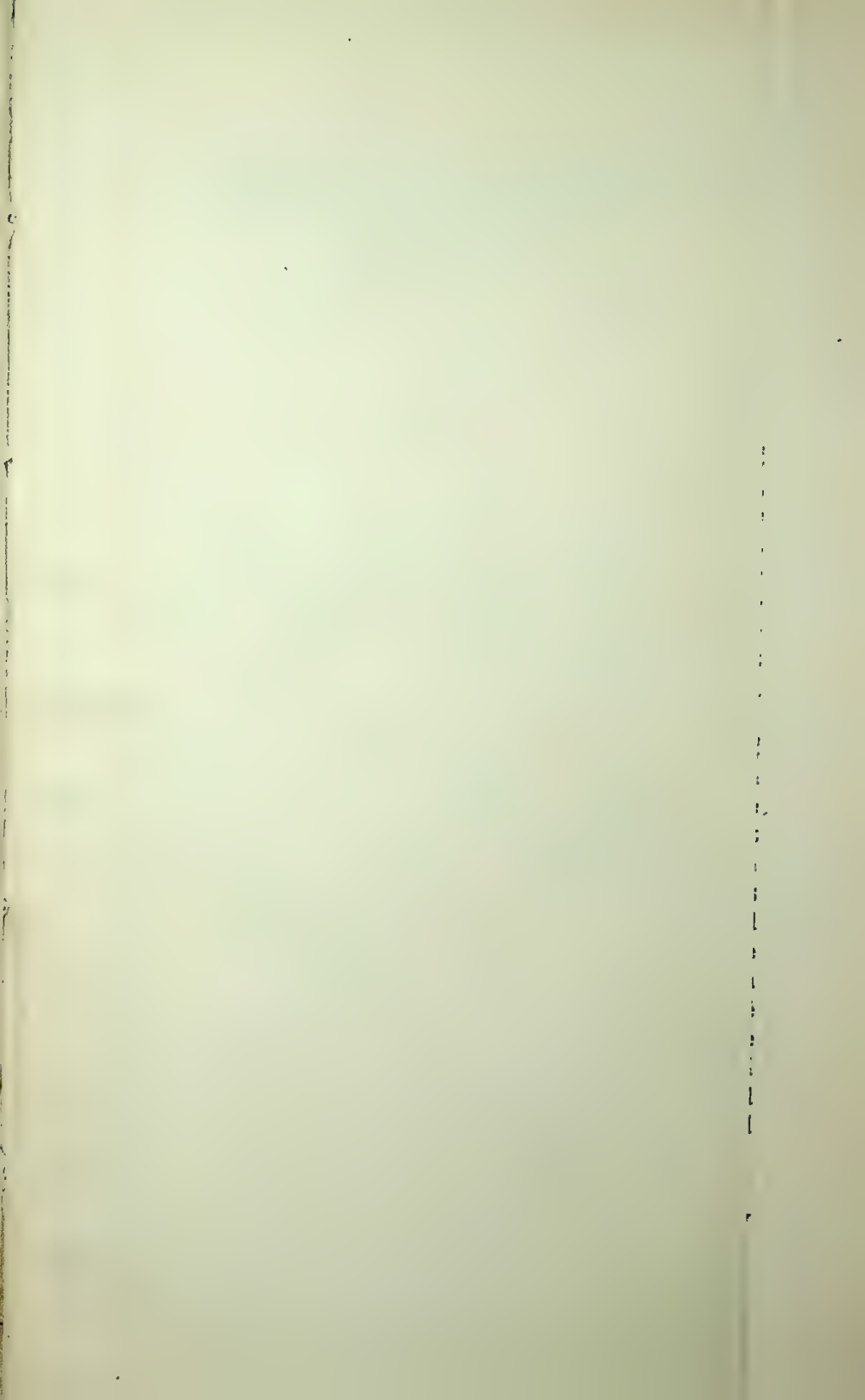
	Facing Page
1. NORTHERN INDIA (1857) (At the beginning of the Book)	
2. BATTLE OF CAWNPORE (27th November, 1857) ..	115
3. BATTLE OF CAWNPORE (6th December, 1857) ..	133
4. ACTION AT KOTAH-KI-SARAI (17th June, 1858) ..	188
5. TATYA'S MARATHON RACE .. .. .	194

## IN TEXT

I. <i>Dispositions of Tatya's Troops at Cawnpore</i> (26th June, 1857) .. .. .	20
II. <i>Battle of Cawnpore</i> (16th July, 1857) .. ..	43
III. <i>Dispositions of Tatya Tope's Troops</i> (17th November, 1857) .. .. .	108
IV. <i>Attack on Jhansi</i> (3rd April, 1858) .. ..	157
V. <i>Battle of the Betwa</i> (1st April, 1858) .. ..	160
VI. <i>Battle of Kunch</i> (7th May, 1858) .. ..	174
VII. <i>Battle of Kalpi</i> (22nd May, 1858) .. ..	181









## Chapter 1

# BURSTING OF THE STORM

### *'Jan Kampanee Bahadur'*

"OCCASIONS, complexes, patriotism, impinging on a grain of inborn character, of such are leaders made."\* The occasion, which brought Tatya Tope to the forefront of the stage of Indian History, was the War of Independence, which broke out in the summer of 1857 and continued with unabated vigour for full two years. Moved by a mighty impulse the people of a large part of India made a supreme effort to rid the country of the foreign rulers — the arrogant Feringhis, who had originally come to trade with them and had ended by becoming their masters. Curiously enough '*Jan Kampanee Bahadur*'† was quite unaware of the approaching storm, which was about to burst on him in all its unexpected fury. It is true that early in 1857 he had heard faint murmurs of discontent but that had not disturbed his equanimity. He was on the other hand in high spirits for he had just succeeded in consolidating his power. What a glorious achievement indeed! He had emerged as the mighty champion from the arena of the struggle for supremacy, which had lasted for more than a century. With deft strokes and powerful blows the doughty warriors had been laid low — Dupleix, whose head was as full of imperialistic ideas as a warren is full of rabbits; Haider Ali, whose rapidity of movements and strategic deployment of forces was a marvel of skill and

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\* George Mac Munn: **Leadership through the Ages** (1935), p. 230

† The East India Company was called '**Jan Kampanee Bahadur**' by the people of India



efficiency; the Raja of Bharatpur, whose strong fort had humbled the pride of Lord Lake, the conqueror of Delhi; the Marathas, whose mighty hordes had swept the plains of India like a hurricane; the sturdy little Gurkhas, who had hurled defiance from their mountain fastnesses; and the stalwart Sikhs, who had earned a name for themselves by their reckless courage and elan. There were other warriors of lesser note, such as the Pindaris and the Amirs of Sindh, who had been knocked down with powerful blows. Puny opponents like Siraj-ud-Daula and the Nawab of Oudh, had been swept away like chaff before wind. '*Jan Kampanee Bahadur*' had emerged triumphant from the struggle. And what a glittering prize was the reward of his efforts — a splendid fabric of an empire — a diadem fit to adorn a Queen's Crown!

### *Intolerance of the White Race*

While '*Jan Kampanee Bahadur*' was feeling legitimate pride in the accomplishment of the splendid task of the building up of an empire, dark brooding thoughts were agitating the minds of his subject races. Whatever might have been the subsidiary causes which led to the war of Indian Independence in 1857 — the greased cartridges, Lord Dalhousie's policy of annexation, the doctrine of lapse, the defects in the organisation of the Native Army etc. — the fundamental fact was that there was a wide gulf dividing the foreign rulers from their subject races. It was this fundamental fact which lay at the root of the whole trouble. William Howard Russell, the pioneer and prince of War Correspondents, who toured India, as a special correspondent of the *Times* in the fateful year 1858, laid with unerring skill his finger on the weak spot of the British administration — the strong racial prejudice against the coloured race. He pointed out that the White Race (*la race blanche*) — the favourites of heaven — the civilizers of the world — were the most intolerant in the world. "They will forgive no man who has a coloured stratum under the *rete muco-*

*sum*. They have trodden under foot the last germs of the coloured races wherever they could do; in other instances, they have hunted them out of their own land into miserable exile — as they advance, the barbarian recedes. It is the will of Providence; it is the destiny of the white man, to whom God has given greater energy, intelligence and physical resources, that he should spoil the dusky Egyptian\*.” India, however, presented a different problem for it was not possible to exterminate its inhabitants. “Do what we may or can, our race can neither destroy the inhabitants of India as the Americans destroyed the Red men, nor can it dispossess them and drive them out to other regions as the Spaniards drove out the Mexicans. And were it possible for us to succeed, Hindostan, would at once become a desert in which our race would miserably perish in the first generation.†” Therefore the only alternative for the English ruling classes in India was not to give free play to their colour prejudices; “they must either abate their strong *natural* feelings against the coloured race, restrain the expression of their antipathies, or look forward to the day, not far distant, when the indulgence of their passions will render the government of India too costly a luxury for the English people.‡” Unfortunately this wise precept, which might have served as a golden bridge for the gulf which divided the ruling classes from their subject races, was not followed. The inhabitants of India were contemptuously called ‘niggers’ and were treated with haughty disdain. Even while travelling in a ship to India, Russell could not help noticing this fierce racial antipathy. He relates how an English Major gave vent to his racial feelings. “By Jove! sir,” exclaims the major, who has by this time got to the walnut stage of argument, to which he has arrived by gradations of sherry, port, ale, and Madeira, — “By Jove!” he exclaims, thickly and fiercely, with every

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\* W. H. Russell: *My Diary in India* (London 1859), p. 30

† Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 31

‡ *Ibid*, p. 31

vein in his forehead swollen like a whipcord, "these niggers are such a confounded sensual lazy set, cramming themselves with ghee and sweetmeats, and smoking their cursed chillumjees all day and all night, that you might as well think to train pigs.\*" When Russell landed in India and toured the country he found plenty of evidence of this kind of racial antipathy. He has drawn a vivid picture of the wide differences between the English governing classes and the inhabitants of the country living at an Indian station, which consisted of two parts: the cantonments of the Europeans, the native city and bazaar. "There is no bond of union between the two, in language, or faith, or nationality. The west rules, collects taxes, gives balls, drives carriages, attends races, goes to church, improves its roads, builds its theatres, forms its masonic lodges, holds cutchery, and drinks its pale ale. The east pays taxes in the shape of what it eats grown on taxed land, grumbles, propagates, squabbles, sits in its decaying temples, haunts its rotting shrines, washes in its failing tank, and drinks its semi-putrid water. Between the two there is a great gulf fixed: to bridge it over is the work reserved for him who shall come to stabilitate our empire in the East, if ever he comes at all. The European station is laid out in large rectangles formed by wide roads. The native city is an aggregate of houses perforated by tortuous paths, so that a plan of it would resemble a section of worm-eaten wood. The Europeans live in detached houses, each surrounded by walls enclosing large gardens, lawns, out-offices. The natives live packed in squeezed-up tenements, kept from falling to pieces by mutual pressure. The handful of Europeans occupy four times the space of the city which contains tens of thousands of Hindoos and Mussulmans. The sole mark of the rule of the former which exists in the latter, is apparently a large native house, from the top of which floats a flag, and in front of which is a group of natives in blue cotton tunics, with red piping and tulwars by their

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\* Ibid, pp. 29-30



sides. They are the police, and the house is the kotwalee, or residence and office of the native mayor, or kotwal.\* ”

### *The English ruling classes*

Russell has given us beautiful pen pictures of some of the typical representatives of the ruling classes. “Whose buggy is that, preceded by two native troopers, and followed by five or six armed natives running on foot?” “That is the Magistrate and Collector.” “What does he do?” “He sits in cutchery to settle civil cases, and collects the revenue, and adjusts matters connected with the civil administration of the province — for it is one — confided to his control. He is the *burra sahib*, or big man of the station.”

“Who is that in the smart gharry, with servants in livery?” “That is the chaplain of the station, who marries, and baptizes, and performs service for the Europeans.” “Does he go among the natives?” “Not he; he leaves that to the missionaries, of whom there are lots here; but he has a school, which children may attend or not, as they please; and he is a very good chaplain, and very much liked and respected.”

“Well: and who comes next along the drive, in that very smart buggy, with the bay mare?” “That is the doctor of the station. He attends the sick Europeans. He also gets, under certain circumstances, head-money for every native soldier in garrison.” “Does he attend them?” “I should think not! Why, how on earth could he attend a lot of niggers?” “But why is he paid for them?” “Ah, that is another matter. You must understand our system a little better before you can comprehend things of this sort.”

“Who is this jolly-looking fellow on the grey arab?” “That is the judge of the station: a very good fellow; all judges are rather slow coaches, you know. They do the

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\* Ibid, pp. 106-107

criminal business, and it is not much matter if they make mistakes, as they don't meddle with Europeans. When they can do nothing else with a fellow, in the civil service, they make him a judge.\* "

### *Want of sympathy*

Even the glaring economic contrasts might have been tolerated by the subject races if they had been governed with tact and sympathy. Unfortunately the English ruling classes betrayed utter want of sympathy in their dealings with the subject races. Russell could not fail to perceive "the utter absence of any friendly relations between the white and black faces when they are together. Here comes a trooper — a tall fine old fellow, with face as fair as that of many a sunburnt soldier from England — he carries a despatch for the Lord Sahib — he has ridden with it fifty miles through a country full of rebels. The old Sikh asks for the tent of the Chief; he dismounts, sticks his lance in the ground, fastens his panting horse to it, and stalks in his long leather boots — his heels, perhaps, stuck up in a crease of the leather six inches above the sole — through the camp. It is ten to one if a soul notices him, and if he goes to a wrong tent he is saluted with an adjuration, and a request to go to a place far beyond the limits of the camp, by the angry young gentleman who has been disturbed in his "Pendennis", or in the contemplation of a fine "ash". The old soldier will follow his own sahib to the last; but for strange sahibs he has not much regard, and he thinks it's their nature to be rough and rude, and so he shuffles forth on his cruise, looking hopelessly about for the dera, till some kind mortal compassionates his distress. What is the old trooper's revenge? Why, he sticks in our service, saving up money and remitting it to his family — retires on his pension, and then, when his last hour is near, his last act is to try and get

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\* Ibid, pp. 107-108

his name "scratched", so that he may not *die* in the service of the stranger.\* "

It was this want of sympathy which produced the most deplorable results. "It is hard to bear the rule of an alien at any time; but when that alien is haughty, imperious, and sometimes insolent and offensive, his authority is only endured till the moment has arrived to destroy it, or at least to rise in rebellion, hopeless or successful, against a government which has violated all the conditions of possibility.† "

### *Inevitable struggle*

Even the glaring economic contrasts and the deep racial antipathies might have been tolerated if the Government had made an earnest effort to improve the social condition of the mass of the people. Russell doubted whether any such attempt had been made. "In effect, the grave, unhappy doubt which settles in my mind is, whether India is the better for our rule, so far as regards the social condition of the great mass of the people." Russell added the following significant remarks: "We have put down widow-burning, we have sought to check infanticide; but I have travelled hundreds of miles through a country peopled with beggars and covered with wigwam villages.‡ "

In the end Russell came to the uncomfortable conclusion that force was the basis of the British rule in India. "I am deeply impressed by the difficulty of ruling India as it is now governed by force, exercised by a few who are obliged to employ natives as the instruments of coercion. That force is the base of our rule I have no doubt; for I see nothing else but force employed in our relations with

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\* Ibid, pp. 111-112

† Ibid, p. 30

‡ Ibid, p. 115



the governed.\*" This was not a healthy state of affairs and it was bound to lead to a conflict. The struggle between the English ruling classes and their subject races lay in the logic of history.

### *The Outbreak of the War*

The tide of nationalism was flowing strong. The powerful Bengal Native Army, which had been the instrument of the success of '*Jan Kampanee Bahadur*', at last turned against its master. The trumpet of freedom rang loud and clear. Its liquid notes were heard in the rich plains of the Jumna and the Ganges, the mountain fastnesses of Vindhya-chal and the ravines of the Chambal. People from far and near rallied under the banner of the nationalist leaders. There was Bahadur Shah, the Mughal Emperor, who though old and blind, felt the throb of the nationalist impulse. He was eager to see the Mughal flag flying on the ramparts of the Red Fort of Delhi. There was Nana Sahib, the adopted son of the Peshwa Baji Rao II, who was impatient to revive the departed glories of the Maratha Empire. There was Khan Bahadur Khan ready to carve out an independent kingdom for himself in Rohilkhand. There was Ahmed Allah, the Maulvi of Fyzabad, who with his skilful diplomacy and organising capacity was espousing the cause of the Nawab of Oudh. There was the venerable but energetic Kunwar Singh, who was rallying the people of Bihar to the nationalist cause. There was Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi, who by her heroism was casting a magic spell on the masses. And lastly there was the lithe and energetic Tatyā Tope who was eager to measure swords with his redoubtable opponent — '*Jan Kampanee Bahadur*.'

The first blow for the independence of the country was struck on May 10, 1857, at Meerut when three native regiments (the 3rd Light Cavalry and the 11th and 20th Native Infantry) mutinied and marched to Delhi where the native

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\* Ibid, p. 115

sepoys joined them and proclaimed Bahadur Shah the Emperor of India. Once more the Mughal flag fluttered on the ramparts of the Red Fort. The War of Independence had begun. The nationalist cause soon gained in momentum so that by the first week of June the tide of nationalism seemed to sweep all opposition before it.

## Chapter II

### A DREAM COME TRUE

#### *Nana Sahib*

THE dramatic turn of events in the summer of 1857, which precipitated the War of Independence, brought to the front Tatyá Tope, a Maharashtrian Brahmin, an ardent patriot and a leader of remarkable ability. Tatyá Tope was born in the household of Peshwa Baji Rao II about the year 1812. He was hardly five years of age when the fortunes of his master underwent a sudden change. Peshwa Baji Rao II was defeated by the British forces in 1817 and lost his splendid empire. He was granted an annual pension of eight lakhs of rupees. He built a fine palace at Bithur, pleasantly situated twelve miles up the river from Cawnpore. Tatyá Tope grew up into a fine young man, spending many a pleasant hour in the company of Nana Sahib, the adopted son of the Peshwa. Baji Rao died in 1851 and Tatyá Tope's young master, Nana Sahib, became the Maharaja of Bithur. He claimed the annual pension but this claim was not upheld by the Government of India. Bitterly disappointed at the decision he sent his gifted and versatile agent Azimullah Khan to London in 1854 to persuade the higher authorities to give the decision in his favour. Azimullah Khan was handsome and witty and he soon made a mark in English society. Many English ladies were reported to have been captivated by his charming manners. But although he gained success in Mayfair he failed in his mission to persuade the British authorities in England to give the decision in favour of his master. The Nana was sorely disappointed for he considered himself to be wronged by having been deprived of his annual pension. Dark brooding



thoughts of vengeance surged up in his mind but he was helpless for the British power in India seemed to rest on solid foundations and it would have been madness to take up the challenge at that time. May be that a sudden turn of events might give him a chance to strike a blow for the independence of his country and to revive the departed glory of the Peshwas. Wild visions of the past grandeur of the Maratha Empire gave tonic to his mind and vigour to his body. He patiently waited for the day when he might carry out his plan of ridding the country of the foreign yoke. But at the present it would be better not to betray his feelings. It would be sound policy indeed to establish the most cordial relations with the English ruling classes, to entertain them liberally and to move freely in their society.

### *The amiable Maharaja of Bithur*

The Nana was well fitted to play the part of the amiable Maharaja of Bithur. He was a charming host and the European residents of Cawnpore frequently availed themselves of his hospitality for it was a treat to be entertained by the Maharaja of Bithur in his splendid palace in the midst of spacious parks and gardens. Dressed resplendently in the richest kincob and his turban decorated with precious jewels Nana Sahib welcomed the European guests in his reception rooms, which sparkled with mirrors and chandeliers. He was dignified and graceful in his manners. He moved freely amongst his guests, inquiring about the health of the Major's lady who had not turned up for the dinner; cracking jokes with the Assistant Magistrate about some humorous incident which had happened in the court; congratulating the judge on his promotion to the Sudder Court and paying compliments to the fair ladies on their charming manners and graces.\* His rich munificence and hospitality were to pay the Nana rich dividends for when

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\* G. O. Trevelyan: **Cawnpore** (1866), p. 53

Major-General Wheeler, commanding the Cawnpore Division, felt perturbed early in June 1857 at the signs of disaffection manifested by the native sepoy he called to his aid the Nana to keep them under control. It was a splendid opportunity to realize his dream of restoring the glories of the Maratha Empire and the Nana was not the man to let it slip. Till that opportunity, however, presented itself unexpectedly in the summer of 1857 the Nana was content to play the part of the amiable Maharaja of Bithur. He had collected around him a band of energetic youngmen who were to help him in realizing his dream of re-establishing the Maratha Empire. There were his two brothers, Bala Rao and Baba Bhat, the latter being the most influential man in the Nana's household, Rao Sahib, his nephew, the talented Azimullah and last, but not the least, the Nana's faithful *mussahib* (companion) Tatyā Tope.

### *The Cantonment of Cawnpore*

The story of the exploits of Tatyā Tope and his master, the Nana, revolves round the city and cantonment of Cawnpore. Situated on the southern bank of the Ganges, Cawnpore was a place of great strategic and commercial importance, guarding as it did the lines of communication — the Grand Trunk Road stretching from Calcutta to Peshawar, and the road which led over the bridge of boats to Lucknow, and another road which led to Kalpi. On the south bank of the Ganges stretched for about seven miles the cantonment, containing hundreds of bungalows, the barracks of the troops, and the bazaars. The bungalows of the officers and the residents were large and commodious and had a pleasing appearance. The compounds or gardens of the bungalows were handsomely planted. These gardens were considered some of the finest in India and produced in abundance, and of excellent quality, most European vegetables, grapes, peaches, mangoes, shaddocks, plantains, melons, oranges, limes, guavas, custard apples. In the centre of the cantonment, on the highest ground, were two

stone buildings, of very imposing exterior — the Assembly rooms and the theatre. There was another grand building — the Church. In the cold season horse-races were held in an extensive piece of open ground to the north-west of the cantonment. Cawnpore was in fact an important military station, being the Headquarters of the Cawnpore Division. In its palmy days Cawnpore could boast of a garrison consisting of two cavalry regiments, a lot of artillery, and three regiments of infantry. With the extension of the British frontier to the foothills beyond the river Indus the importance of Cawnpore, as of other military stations in the North-West Provinces and Oudh had declined and the British regiments were mostly stationed in the Punjab to guard the vital North-West Frontier of India. Thus it came about that when the War of Indian Independence broke out in May 1857 the nationalist leaders found circumstances extremely favourable for prosecuting the war with vigour and determination. Oudh, the North-West Provinces, Central India and Rajputana had been largely denuded of British troops and were garrisoned mostly by the Native sepoys, who, swept by the irresistible tide of nationalism, contributed to the initial success of the nationalist movement.

The native town of Cawnpore was ill built and dirty, yet had a pleasing appearance as seen from without. The bazaars were well supplied with the wares of Europe, China and India, the jewellers were considered excellent workmen, and the place was celebrated for the manufacture of leather, and of articles fabricated from that material.\* The Ghat on the bank of the river presented an animated scene. The commerce at the Ghat was busy and important, the Ganges being navigable downwards to the sea, a distance of about 1,000 miles, and upwards to a distance of 300 miles. Different types of boats could be seen sailing on

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\* Edward Thornton: *Gazetteer of the territories under the Government of the East India Company* (London 1858), p. 190



the serene and placid waters of the Ganges — the pinnacle, which with its three masts and neat rigging, might have passed for a ship; clumsy bridgerows, with their sterns several times higher than their bows; bauleahs, lightly skimming along like gondolas; the country boats, with their native crews straining every nerve upon their summits, and cheering themselves with a wild and not unfrequently a sweet song; penchways shooting swiftly down the stream, with one person only on board, who sat at the head steering with his right hand, rowing with his foot, and in the left hand holding his pipe.\*

### *Gay Society*

The European residents of Cawnpore, numbering about 750, led a gay social life, quite unaware of the grim tragedy that was to overtake them. The gifted Russell thus conjures up before our vision this aspect of the English society. "The solemn etiquette, the visits to the Brigadier and the General *en grande tenue*, the invitations to dinner, the white kid-gloves, the balls, the liveries, the affectation of the *plus haut ton des hauts tons*, the millinery anxieties of the ladies, the ices and champagne, and the golden-robed Nana Sahib, moving about amid haughty stares and ill-concealed dislike. "What the deuce does the General ask that nigger here for?" The little and big flirtations, the drives on the road — a dull, ceremonious pleasure — the faded fun of the private theatricals, the exotic absurdities of the masonic revels, the marryings and givings in marriage, the little bills done by the rich bunneahs, the small and great pecuniary relations between the station and the bazaar, the sense of security—and then on all this exaggerated relief of an English garrison-town and watering place, the deep gloom of apprehension—at first "a shave of old Smith's," then a well-authenticated report, then a certainty of disaffection—rolling like thunder-clouds, and

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\* Ibid, pp. 189-190

darkening the glassy surface of the gay society till it burst on it in stormy and cruel reality.”\*

### *The Nana's triumph*

The first blow for the independence of the country was struck on May 10 but it was not till June 5 that the native sepoys at Cawnpore rallied to the support of the nationalist movement. At that time the European force at Cawnpore consisted of one company of artillery (59 men) with six guns and 105 men of infantry. The native sepoys, numbering approximately 3,000 consisted of the 2nd Regiment of Light Cavalry, the 1st, 53rd and 56th Regiments of Infantry, and Golundaze or native gunners attached to the battery. As the people of Cawnpore became restive at the end of May, Hillersdon, the Magistrate, sought the help of the Nana in restoring confidence amongst the sepoys and the residents of Cawnpore. The Nana had been allowed by Government a retinue of 500 cavalry and infantry, with three guns of small calibre. He eagerly responded to the call for help and took up his residence in Nawabgunj on May 22 while his armed retainers guarded the treasury. Fate had intervened unexpectedly and provided an opportunity to the Nana to carry out his plans. He set about his task in right earnest. The key to his success lay in winning over the sepoys to his side. It was not a difficult task for India was astir and the tide of nationalism was flowing strong. The Nana's agents were at work. It was the 2nd Light Cavalry which first espoused the Nana's cause. In this regiment was a gifted leader—Subedar Teeka Singh—who exercised tremendous influence. His efforts were nobly backed up by Havildar-Major Gopal Singh, and Sowars Shamsh-ud-Din Khan, Sheikh Bulaki, Sirdar Beg and Rai Singh. They held discussions for two hours with the Nana and Bala Sahib in a boat at Manji Ghat. The 2nd Light Cavalry was completely won over but only

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\* Russell, op. cit., p. 114

partial success attended the efforts to win over the sepoy of the infantry regiments, for while the 1st Regiment showed good response, the 53rd and the 56th Regiments hesitated to throw in their lot with the Nana. But the nationalist pressure proved too strong for them and they too swung over to the nationalist side.

Apprehending outbreak of disturbances in the city, Wheeler ordered (on June 3) all the European residents to move into the entrenchment, which had been hurriedly prepared for defence against a sudden attack. There were two single-storied barracks, one of them being thatched. Both were surrounded by a flat roof or verandah. Their walls were of bricks, one and a half feet thick. There were some out-offices attached to these buildings. There was also a well near by. Around these barracks a trench was dug, and earth thrown up on the outside, so as to form a parapet, which was about four feet high. This was the entrenchment, which was meant to afford shelter to the European residents in case of sudden attack. On June 4 Wheeler took steps to store provisions for a month. His preparations for defence against sudden attack were hardly completed when the storm burst in all its fury. An incident happened which inflamed public feelings. A British Officer in a fit of intoxication had fired on a patrol of the 2nd Light Cavalry. He was tried by court-martial but acquitted. This verdict precipitated the conflict. On June 5 the 2nd Light Cavalry took the lead in the nationalist struggle; they left their lines, for Nawabgunj, the north-west suburb of Cawnpore, where lay the treasury and the magazine. They were followed by the 1st Native Infantry. Shortly afterwards the Nana sent an urgent message to the men of the other infantry regiments to rally to his support. A havildar and a sepoy of the 53rd Regiment gave the signal and the men rushed to the quarter-guard for the colours and the treasure-chest. The Subedar, who commanded the guard, offered resistance and was shot dead



Alarmed at the turmoil Wheeler ordered the British battery to open fire on the barracks. As a round shot came hurtling through the quarters of the 56th Regiment, the sepoys of both the regiments fled to join their comrades in Nawabganj. They were soon afterwards joined by the native gunners of the 3rd Oudh Horse Battery. The Nana placed himself at the head of these troops and distributed cash from the treasury amongst them. Then the sepoys moved to the magazine, loaded their baggage, took as much small arms ammunition as they could, and marched off to Kalyanpur, the first stage on the road to Delhi. Acting on the first impulse the troops had moved on towards Delhi for the cry 'Delhi Chalo' (march to Delhi) was irresistible. But the Nana and his astute advisers realised only too well the folly of leaving Cawnpore for Delhi. To concentrate all the forces at Delhi would be bad strategy since it would enable the British forces to march unopposed for the attack on Delhi. Seizure of Cawnpore, on the other hand, would cut off the vital line of communication from Calcutta to Delhi. Therefore the Nana persuaded the troops to march back to Cawnpore on June 6.

Now the Nana set about the task of infusing vigour into the administration, which had completely broken down. The task of restoring law and order was not easy. The Nana however took energetic steps to establish his authority in the city. He presided over the highest criminal court and was assisted in the judicial work by his brothers Bala Rao and Baba Bhat, Azimullah and Jwala Pershad. The lower court was presided over by the Nana's deputy, Ram Lal. Hulas Singh was appointed Kotwal (Chief Magistrate) and Wasi-ud-Din the Qazi of the city\*. The second task confronting the Nana was that of reducing to submission the entrenched European garrison. This task was entrusted to Tatya Tope, the Nana's military adviser.

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\* No. 23 Statement of Hulas Singh, Appendix C IV, 'State Papers' (edited by Forrest) Vol. II

*Tatya Tope's Army*

Tatya Tope was ably helped by some of the experienced officers who had served in the Bengal Army. Jwala Pershad, Commander-in-Chief of the Nana's forces, showed sound grasp of military affairs. Subedar Teeka Singh, promoted as Chief of the 2nd Light Cavalry with the title of General, displayed energy and vigour in conducting the operations. Subedar Dugunjun Singh, appointed Colonel of the 53rd Native Infantry, and Subedar Gangadin, appointed Colonel of the 56th Native Infantry were officers of ripe experience. Tatya Tope was also fortunate in securing the support of an influential local Mohammedan noble, Nunny Nawab, who proved to be an able adviser on military matters. Tatya Tope had not only experienced officers to help him in carrying out operations, but he had also well-disciplined troops under his command. He had a regiment of excellent cavalry well mounted and equipped and three fine infantry battalions of sepoys armed with muskets. There was also a detachment of gunners and drivers from the Oudh Artillery to operate the guns. The force was augmented by the armed retainers of many local zemindars who rallied to the support of the Nana. They came to the Nana's camp with a force of two hundred to four hundred retainers. Others, like Bhawany Singh, brought still larger contingents of matchlock-men. Tatya Tope's force was still further reinforced by the native sepoys of the neighbouring stations. Of these the most useful were the Oudh soldiers of the Nadiri and Akhtari Regiments (the 4th and 5th Oudh Irregular Infantry) under the command of an influential Muslim noble, Mir Nawab. Not only had Tatya Tope a large and efficient army and experienced officers to lead it, but he had also a vast magazine at his disposal and a full treasury to pay the soldiers well and keep them contented.

*Tatya Tope's Skilful Tactics*

Tatya Tope lost no time in launching an attack on the entrenched European garrison. As soon as the troops

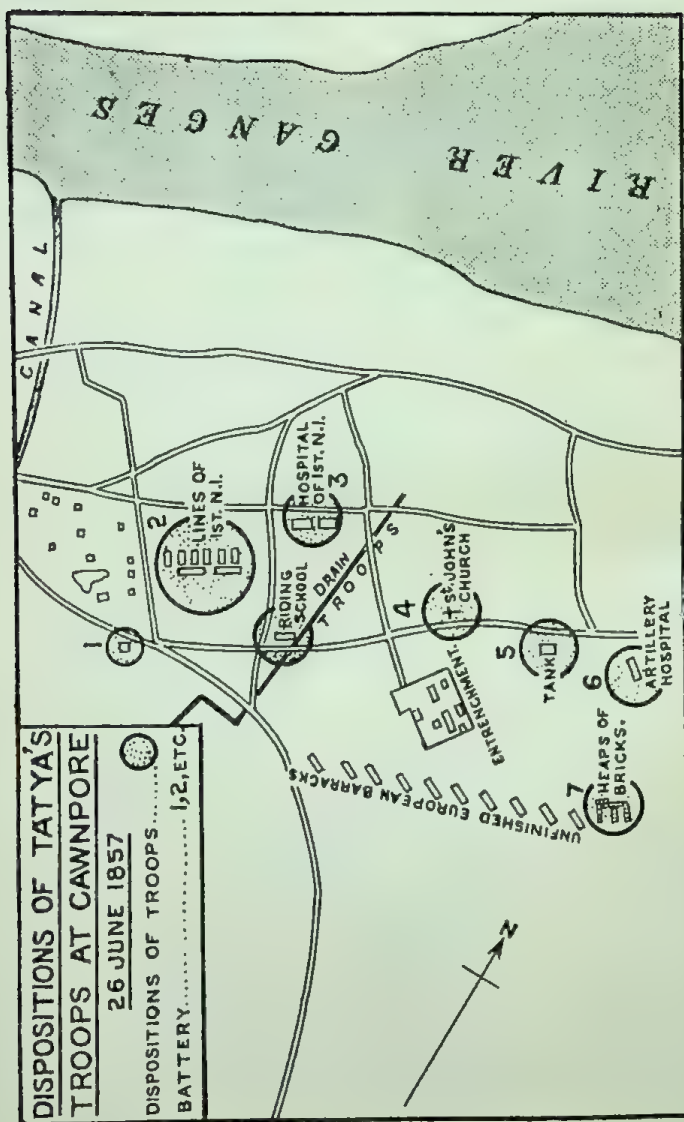
returned to Cawnpore from Kalyanpur he ordered General Teeka Singh to go to the magazine and despatch serviceable guns to the scene of action. Teeka Singh secured a fleet of thirty boats laden with shot, shell and heavy cannon. The guns which were in good condition were despatched to the front while the rest were ordered to be brushed up on the lathes by skilled artificers. When a battery was established under cover of the newly built lines of the 1st Native Infantry, Tatya Tope gave the signal for the guns to commence playing on the entrenchment. The first shot was fired at about half-past 10 A.M. on June 6. The British guns kept up a brisk fire and returned nearly every shot of Tatya Tope's guns. In the meantime Tatya Tope's troops commenced bringing round their guns closer to the entrenchment, behind the Riding School and the compound walls of the buildings, which provided adequate cover. An incessant fire of musketry was poured into the entrenchment from the nearest buildings, and guns of large calibre, drawing gradually closer and closer, sent their shot and shell without intermission, against the brick walls of the barracks. The 24-pounder guns proved destructive on account of their proximity to the entrenchment; the shots from them were fired with such force and precision as to bring down whole pillars of the verandahs, and go through the pukka walls of the barracks.\*

Tatya Tope showed considerable skill in the disposition of his forces for the projected attack on the entrenchment. An iron ring of outposts, strongly garrisoned by infantry, was drawn around the entrenchment. Every building, nullah or any other suitable place for posting the infantry was fully utilised. Thus hundreds of sepoys crouched in the long drain, which flowed past the entrenchment into the river. The Riding School, St. John's Church, the Officers' bungalows and a tank with high embankments pro-

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\* W. J. Shepherd. *A personal Narrative of the outbreak and massacre at Cawnpore* (Lucknow 1879), P. 43





vided good shelter to the infantry. Hardly 250 yards from the entrenchment was a strong position (near the unfinished European barracks) consisting of a heap of bricks, which was held by the troops of Tatyá Tope. Then there were the unfinished European barracks, so near to the entrenchment, which provided a suitable base for the infantry to launch attacks on the entrenched European garrison. Thus the infantry was tactically well disposed to pour an incessant fire of musketry into the entrenchment. Tatyá Tope also showed considerable skill in the setting up of the batteries. The entrenchment was surrounded on all sides by the guns and mortars so as to bring their effective fire on the European garrison. The first battery (one 24-pounder gun) was set up near the lines of the 1st Native Infantry; the second (two 24-pounder guns) in the lines of the 1st Native Infantry; the third (two 24-pounder howitzers) in the Hospital of the 1st Native Infantry; the fourth (two mortars) behind St. John's Church; the fifth (two 24-pounder and one 18-pounder guns) near the tank; the sixth (two 18-pounder guns) in the Artillery Hospital; and the seventh (one 9-pounder gun) on the heap of bricks near the unfinished European barracks.\*

Tatyá adopted sound tactics. His plan of attack was simple and effective. He knew that the garrison, cooped up in a narrow entrenchment in a plain, commanded by buildings all around, would not be able to hold out for long. He also realised that the inclemencies of the weather would terribly affect the efficiency of the British soldiers. The heat was intense and a hot wind blew like a blast from a furnace. The barrel of a gun was like a red-hot iron. He was also aware of the fact that the garrison had only guns of low calibre, which were outmatched in range and effectiveness by his heavy guns. Therefore the best policy was to concentrate the fire of his guns on the British guns so as to disable them, keep up an incessant

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\* Shepherd, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43

fire of musketry, maintain the pressure on the British picket adjoining the entrenchment and only occasionally launch attacks with the infantry and the cavalry. Tatya Tope's tactics yielded rich results for the garrison was compelled to capitulate within three weeks.

### *The British Garrison*

The victory was however won not over a despicable foe for the British troops fought with grim determination and doggedness against tremendous odds. The European garrison consisted approximately of 800 persons, of whom about four hundred were women and children. To guard them there were two hundred soldiers. They had only guns of low calibre at their disposal. The British troops were disposed in such a manner as to meet enemy attacks as well as to pound his positions with artillery. The northern side of the entrenchment was defended by a frail earthwork, called the Redan. At the south-east corner was located a battery (one 24-pounder howitzer and two 9-pounder guns). One battery (three 9-pounder guns) was located in the north-east angle of the entrenchment, while another (three 9-pounder guns) was in the north-west corner, flanked by a rifled 3-pounder gun. The batteries were supported by infantry. Then there was a picket in one of the unfinished European barracks, which was manned by a group of intrepid soldiers, who bore the brunt of enemy attacks.

### *Tatya Tope's Vigorous attacks*

Tatya Tope pushed on the siege with vigour. The entrenchment was surrounded by a cordon of batteries. The infantry was in possession of all the bungalows, compound walls and out-buildings near the entrenchment. St. John's Church, commanding as it did the country around, proved particularly useful to the infantry to pour into the entrenchment an incessant fire of musketry. Another strategic place was the newly built (unfinished)



European barracks. The sepoy occupied the first three of these barracks but their attempts to creep forward for the attack on the entrenchment were thwarted by a handful of British troops led by Captain Moore, who manned the picket (barrack No. 6). This British officer displayed remarkable courage in guarding the vital outpost, so dangerously near to the entrenchment. Whenever the pressure of Tatya Tope's troops increased he issued from the barrack at the head of a small force of about twelve Europeans in the midst of brisk firing and after a successful sortie returned to his picket.

One of the major problems facing the garrison was how to secure sufficient water for their needs. There was only one well in the middle of the entrenchment. The sepoy kept up their fire so incessantly, during day and night, that it was perilous to approach the well. When the reserve supply of water kept in the jars was exhausted water was fetched from the well at night, when the sepoy could not well direct their fire.

In the first four or five days the British guns kept up brisk firing but after that their fire slackened for, it was considered inadvisable to exhaust the ammunition, particularly as the fire was not effective, for Tatya Tope's troops took great care to keep well under cover. Emboldened by this Tatya Tope thought of launching an attack on the entrenchment with the infantry and the cavalry. So on June 12 his troops made the first assault. The cavalry led the attack but it was repulsed. Then the infantry advanced to attack but a shower of grape dispersed them also. Tatya Tope realized that it would be premature to launch the attack unless the British guns were effectively dealt with and silenced. Accordingly he exhorted the gunners to redouble their efforts. Thus urged by their Chief the gunners soon gained a signal triumph. They commenced firing live shells well heated with the intention of setting on fire the tents in the compound and the thatched barrack. Several tents were burnt and at last on June 13 the barrack also

took fire and the breeze being very strong was burnt. The hospital stores were completely destroyed. This was the achievement of Riaz Ali, an artillery-man of Nunny Nawab's battery at the racket court, who fired a ball of resin igniting the thatched barrack. The Nana was so delighted at this feat that he sent the Nawab a sum of 5,000 rupees as a reward for his services. The loss of this barrack, which had provided accommodation for the sick and the wounded, was a serious set-back for the garrison. It was indeed for them a night of horror. The roar of the flames, intermingled with that of the batteries, the scream of the round shot and the shrieks of the wounded created a weird scene.

Tatya Tope was elated with his success but he bided his time for the assault on the entrenchment. It would be premature to launch this assault before the British guns had been knocked out of action. Moreover a British counter-attack, which followed this success, showed that the British garrison had enough pluck left in them to continue the struggle. Captain Moore, at the head of about fifty picked men, made a surprise attack at the dead of the ensuing night of the burning of the barrack and succeeded in spiking a number of guns. This was a salutary lesson to Tatya's troops that the spirit of the British garrison was not completely broken. Such brave deeds certainly helped to keep up the morale of the garrison. The net was however fast closing on them. For Tatya Tope knew how to play a cautious but skilful game. With the overwhelming advantage which he enjoyed of having several guns of large calibre it would have been folly to sacrifice his troops in an assault on a defensive position before neutralising the enemy fire. So he held the infantry and cavalry in readiness to attack the entrenchment as soon as the enemy guns showed signs of slackening their fire. The contest was too unequal to last long. By the end of the first week the havoc wrought was considerable — all the fifty-nine British gunners were either killed or wounded and

six guns were knocked out of action. The round shot from the guns and the musketry fire harassed the garrison a good deal. The roar of the batteries was followed by the scream of the round shot as it tore overhead and plunged into the trenches. The bullets pattered on the wall like hail. When the enemy fire slackened considerably Tatya Tope thought that the time had come for unleashing his infantry and cavalry for an assault on the entrenchment. But he was cautious and decided to probe into enemy defences before launching a vigorous attack. This task was entrusted to Mir Nawab, who had brought fresh reinforcements to the Nana on June 15—two Oudh Irregular Infantry Regiments and a full complement of artillery. On June 18 these fresh troops, bubbling over with enthusiasm, made a spirited charge across the plain. Such was the impetuosity of their charge that for a moment they seemed to carry everything before them for they climbed over the rampart, bore down the defenders and overturned a gun, but their triumphant advance was checked by a shower of grape from a 9-pounder gun, and a counter-attack launched by the British troops forced them to retire in haste to their own positions. Though the men of Mir Nawab did not succeed in capturing the entrenchment their audacious charge, which created confusion amongst the garrison, showed that a few more assaults like that would result in victory. Meanwhile Tatya resolved wisely to trust more to his guns than to his infantry and cavalry. The fire increased in volume, in rapidity and in precision and had a telling effect.

### *The Capitulation*

After softening up the enemy position by concentrated fire Tatya Tope decided to launch a vigorous attack on June 23. This day was particularly chosen for the attack for it was the centenary of the battle of Plassey. A hundred years had rolled by and now the wheel of fortune had turned full circle for the country was about to be rid of



the foreign yoke. Tatya Tope's troops were animated with fresh hopes and courage and they pressed forward eagerly to the attack on the entrenchment. Field guns were moved to within a few hundred yards of the entrenchment and the garrison was subjected to a shower of grape and round shot. Then the cavalry advanced to the attack from the Riding School but as they came sweeping forward in a great wave the British guns opened up and dispersed them. The infantry was more cautious and led some well-directed attacks. One attack developed from the direction of St. John's Church. Here the skirmishers adopted a novel method of pushing forward towards the entrenchment. They brought large bales of cotton with them to serve as ramparts, which they rolled before them as they advanced, at the same time keeping up a brisk fire with their muskets. In this manner they advanced to within 150 yards of the entrenchment. Then Tatya Tope's troops in the rear surged forward for the attack. They jumped over the compound walls and poured in a mass into the entrenchment. But the death of their Commander—a Subedar-Major—by a shot from the British musketry discouraged them, and a few rounds of canister drove them back to their base. Meanwhile a furious struggle was raging in the unfinished European barracks. The British outpost (barrack No. 6) had harassed Tatya's troops a good deal. That is why 500 of Tatya Tope's troops had gathered in the first three barracks (Nos. 1 to 3) to liquidate this troublesome outpost. But as they advanced to the attack they were met by a shower of grape from the guns. Then a counter-attack by Captain Moore and 25 Europeans drove them back to their base (barracks Nos. 1 and 2) where a few rounds of canister dispersed them. While these engagements were taking place, 200 of Tatya Tope's soldiers kept up brisk firing on the entrenchment from behind the heap of bricks near the entrenchment. The fire increased in volume and intensity and was only subdued after about two hours by the British guns. The British garrison survived the crisis for all the attacks were beaten back. It

was a day memorable for one daring deed of great valour, which must have excited the admiration even of Tatya Tope's troops. A carriage of a British gun was ignited by an accident. The situation was critical for there was danger that the powder in the battery would explode. Cool as a cucumber, Lt. Delafosse slipped underneath the blazing carriage, pulled down the burning splinters, scattered earth upon the flames and extinguished the fire with the help of two soldiers, in spite of the fact that Tatya Tope's troops were concentrating their fire upon the spot.

The British garrison had weathered the storm and survived the ordeal of June 23. The situation however was critical for the majority of their guns had been knocked out of action, the ammunition was running short and the stocks of provisions were depleted. Defeat stared them in the face. Wheeler therefore felt considerably relieved when on June 25 he received the following message from the Nana: "All those who are in no way connected with the acts of Lord Dalhousie, and are willing to lay down their arms, shall receive a safe passage to Allahabad." On June 26 Azimullah and Jwala Pershad, who were deputed by the Nana to conduct the negotiations, succeeded in coming to an agreement with Wheeler. The latter agreed to surrender the fortified position, the guns and the treasure. The Nana on the other hand agreed to provide facilities for the evacuation of the garrison.

### *The Massacre of the Garrison*

In the morning on June 27 the Nana provided transport facilities to enable the garrison to reach the Sati Choura Ghat—the place of embarkation. Then followed an act of treachery, which has been universally condemned. On a carpet spread on the platform of the Fisherman's Temple (above the Ghat) sat Bala Rao, Azimullah, Jwala Pershad and Tatya Tope. As the Englishmen, women and children were entering the boats the blast of a bugle was heard; it

was the signal for the massacre of the British garrison. Many were killed by musketry fire, four managed to escape, while the other survivors (mostly women and children numbering about 200) were taken prisoners, confined in a house and massacred after a fortnight on the approach of the relieving British force.

No excuse can be offered for such crimes against humanity except that racial and nationalist wars, arousing as they do the most violent passions, are often characterised by such acts of cruelty. No quarter is sought and none is given. All the pent up fury of the subject race finds expression in such acts of ruthlessness while the reprisals of the government are no less savage and indiscriminate. Here is one typical example of how the English ruling classes behaved. "When Neill marched from Allahabad, his executions were so numerous and so indiscriminate, that one of the officers attached to his column had to remonstrate with him on the ground that if he depopulated the country he could get no supplies for the men."\* War in fact can never be purged of a dross of cruelty and barbarism. "Conduct warfare on the most chivalrous principles, there must ever be a touch of murder about it, and the assassin will lurk under fine phrases. The most civilized troops will commit excesses and cruelties, which must go unpunished, as they did in Badajoz. With all its chivalry, the field of Crecy, or of Agnicourt, must have been fearful in its cruelty, when, not to mention the slaughter of prisoners, the kernes and churls with their sharp knives went searching out the chinks in the armour of the fallen knights and nobles, and pierced them to death as they lay helpless on the field."† It is racial and nationalist wars however which provoke the most violent conflict. As Russell puts it: "We tortured our Jews once on a time as the Hindoos and Mohammedans mutilate their Christians now, and I presume our

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\* Russell: *My Diary in India*, p. 130

† Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-171



Crusaders—if not the knights, at least their barbarous followers—gave scant grace to the Moslem.”\* History gives many instances of racial massacres. To quote Russell again: “Helpless garrisons, surrendering under capitulation, have been massacred ere now; men, women and children have been ruthlessly butchered by the enemies of their race ere now; risings, such as the people of Pontus under Mithridates, of the Irish Roman Catholics against the Protestant settlers in 1641, of the actors in the Sicilian Vespers, of the assassins who smote and spared none on the Eve of St. Bartholomew, have been over and over again attended by inhuman cruelty, violation and torture. The history of medieval Europe affords many instances of crimes as great as those of Cawnpore; the history of more civilized periods could afford some parallel to them in more modern times, and amid most civilised nations. In fact, the peculiar aggravation of the Cawnpore massacres was this, that the deed was done by a subject race—by black men who dared to shed the blood of their masters, and that of poor helpless ladies and children. Here we had not only a servile war and a sort of Jacquerie combined, but we had a war of religion, a war of race, and a war of revenge, of hate, of some national promptings to shake off the yoke of a stranger, and to re-establish the full power of native chiefs, and the full sway of native religions.”†

### *Revival of the Maratha Empire*

The contest had been fought out; the Nana's dream of re-establishing the Maratha Empire was at last realised. On July 1 the Nana was proclaimed the Peshwa. People from Cawnpore and the neighbouring towns and villages came to Bithur in large numbers to witness the splendour and the grandeur of the ceremony. As the Nana took his seat upon the throne the cymbals clanged, the trumpets

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\* Ibid, p. 170

† Russell, op. cit., p. 97

blared and the exultant crowd wildly cheered to proclaim the revival of the Maratha Empire. It was the hour of triumph—the Nana had realised his ambition of reviving the Maratha Empire.

### Chapter III

## A GAMBLE THAT FAILED

### *The Defence of Cawnpore*

THE Nana was proclaimed the Peshwa on July 1, 1857. His life's ambition had been realised. The booming of the guns in his honour, the wild cheers of joy of the exultant crowd, the brilliant illumination of the city at night thrilled him but he knew that it would be no easy matter to consolidate his power for the British troops would be hurrying from Calcutta for the contest for supremacy. Tatya Tope, his military adviser, who had a practical bent of mind, showed commendable energy in making preparations for the defence of Cawnpore. Reinforcements had poured in from the neighbouring stations to swell his force to 20,000 men, of which a large part comprised the retainers of the zemindars and native levies. Although he had excellent fighting material he did not get sufficient time to forge it into an efficient instrument for winning victories. Nevertheless his efforts, nobly supported as they were by those of Jwala Pershad and Teeka Singh, bore fruit; the troops whom he led against the advancing British force amply proved their worth on the battle-field. Tatya Tope carried out the defence of Cawnpore in a series of skilfully executed engagements, and when he found that the fortune of war had turned against him he showed masterly skill in extricating a large part of his force from an untenable position.

### *Havelock's Force*

While Tatya Tope was busy organising his troops for the struggle for supremacy, Brigadier-General Havelock at



Allahabad was preparing to advance at the head of a large force in order to capture Cawnpore and relieve the British garrison in the Lucknow Residency, which was besieged by a large nationalist force. His preparations were soon completed and his force started from Allahabad on July 7. It consisted of a thousand British troops belonging to four infantry regiments—the 64th, the 78th Highlanders, the 84th Foot, and the 1st Madras Fusiliers, and about eighteen Europeans of the Voluntary Cavalry. The native sepoys of this force comprised 130 Sikhs (the Ferozepore Sikh Regiment). The force was supported by a six gun battery, consisting of two 6-pounders, two 9-pounders and two 12-pounder howitzers. The battery was commanded by Captain Maude of the Royal Artillery. A detachment consisting of 400 British soldiers, 300 Sikhs (the Ferozepore Sikh Regiment), 120 native troopers of the Irregular Cavalry, and two 9-pounders under the command of Major Renaud, of the Madras Fusiliers, had been sent ahead on June 30 as an advance guard to keep the road open for the advance of the main force.

Although the number of fighting men was small the baggage train presented a picturesque sight—a large number of elephants carrying the tents, the long string of cross-looking camels laden with baggage, and the innumerable hackeries and 'dhoolies'. As the column defiled through the town of Allahabad the British troops could not help noticing the 'menacing looks of hatred' that were cast upon them by its inhabitants.\* The troops marched generally during the night to avoid the gruelling summer heat. During the first two days they saw several dead bodies hanging from trees near the road—clear proof that Renaud's force had carried out the task of opening the road by executing suspected rebels. Many innocent people

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\* Maude and Sherer: *Memoirs of the Mutiny* (1894), Vol. 1, p. 33

suffered for as one British officer dryly remarked: "Renaud was rather inclined to hang *all black creation*."\*

### *Jwala Pershad's Faulty Tactics*

By July 10 the British advance guard arrived at a distance of ten miles from Fatehpur. Here Renaud received information that Havelock's column was hurrying up to effect a junction with his force. Renaud wanted to act on the first impulse not to wait for the arrival of the main column but to win laurels by the capture of Fatehpur, which he believed to be inadequately defended. Better sense however prevailed and he decided to wait for the arrival of Havelock's force. He narrowly escaped the trap that was laid for him for although Fatehpur was inadequately defended, Tatya Tope had sent a large force under the command of Jwala Pershad to destroy the British advance guard. Had Renaud acted on his first impulse and made an attempt to capture Fatehpur his small force would have been annihilated.

Early in the morning on July 12 Havelock's force by forced marches effected a junction with the advance guard, thus outwitting Tatya Tope. Generally Tatya Tope was well served by his spies but this time his troops led by Jwala Pershad made a headlong attack on the British force thinking it to be merely the advance guard whereas it turned out to be Havelock's force. The battle of Fatehpur in fact developed very precipitately. After effecting a junction with the advance guard Havelock's force pushed on for about seventeen miles and encamped in an open plain at a distance of four miles from Fatehpur. Havelock sent a patrol of cavalry to reconnoitre the country around Fatehpur. When the cavalry approached Fatehpur a swarm of horsemen rushed upon them. The British patrol galloped back to the camp, furiously pursued by Tatya Tope's

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\* Ibid, p. 41

horsemen. This precipitation proved to be their undoing. Being under the impression that he was dealing with Renaud's force, Jwala Pershad committed the tactical mistake of giving battle in the open plain instead of taking up a strong defensive position in the town of Fatehpur. Fatehpur was a position of no small strength. The only approach to the town was by the Grand Trunk Road which was hard and dry. The plains on both sides of the road were covered with water to the depth of two to four feet. The town contained many houses of good masonry and was surrounded by garden enclosures of great strength. Outside the town in front of the swamps were hillocks, villages and mango-groves which provided good cover to the infantry. Jwala Pershad's force numbered 3,500 men (two regiments of cavalry and three of infantry) and was supported by 12 brass and iron guns. An experienced general would have checked the advance of the British force from the strong defensive position of the town of Fatehpur. By his impetuosity in attacking the British force in the open plain he lost all the advantages of the strong defensive position. Thus it happened that when Jwala Pershad's cavalry came hot in pursuit of the British reconnoitring party he ordered the infantry and the guns to advance and attack the British force. A 24-pound shot came with a whizzing sound into the British camp. Havelock immediately deployed his troops in battle array. In the centre were the guns posted on and close to the road. These were protected by 100 Enfield riflemen of the 64th Regiment. The infantry were thrown into line of quarter-column at deployed distance. The flanks were protected by the small force of volunteers and irregular cavalry. Having thus deployed his force Havelock ordered the attack to be launched. Strange are the vagaries of fortune. The hunter had become the hunted; instead of the large force of Jwala Pershad annihilating Renaud's small force, Havelock's united force routed Jwala Pershad's force. Thus it happened that labouring under the impression that they were only dealing with Renaud's small force Jwala Pershad's cavalry came charging along the



road only to face the solid British line. Surprise and consternation were writ large on their faces and only a few round shots from the guns and a shower of grape sufficed to send them reeling back to their original position. As the screen of cavalry dispersed the British line advanced to the attack. The British guns, supported by infantry and protected by skirmishers and cavalry on the flanks, pushed forward and opened fire at 800 yards on Jwala Pershad's troops and guns. The round shot and the shower of grape created confusion amongst Jwala Pershad's troops, who however rallied behind a second battery placed on the road in the rear. Here they made a bold stand. The infantry rallied and tried to re-form while the cavalry advanced down the road to check the British advance. But all was in vain. "The rifle fire, reaching them at an unexpected distance, filled them with dismay; and when Captain Maude was enabled to push his guns through flank swamps to point blank range, his surprisingly accurate fire demolished their little remaining confidence."\* They fell back on their strong defensive positions in the town of Fatehpur. The British force moved forward to capture these positions. On the right the attack was led by the Madras Fusiliers, who captured a hillock held by Jwala Pershad's troops and then crossed with difficulty the inundated fields to clear the remaining positions. On their left the 78th Highlanders, in extended order, waded through mud and water, keeping up the communication with the centre. The 64th gave strength to the centre and left. The 84th and the Sikh Regiment of Ferozepore made a thrust on the left. As the British force advanced, steadily driving Jwala Pershad's infantry, the guns were captured one after another. The infantry however offered stout resistance and only after fierce fighting were they driven in succession "from the garden enclosures, from a strong barricade on the road, from the town wall into and through, out of, and

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\* From Brigadier-General Havelock to the Deputy Adjutant General of the Army—July 12, 1857

beyond the town.”\* Even then they did not abjectly give up the struggle but made a stand a mile beyond the town. Here an incident took place which helps to explain why the British authorities could not be sure of the loyalty of the native troops, who were fighting on their side. The Native Irregular Horse led by its commander, Lt. Palliser came upon a group of thirty of Jwala Pershad's horsemen. Lt. Palliser ordered his men to charge and dashed forward to the attack. Jwala Pershad's horsemen beckoned the troopers of the Irregular Horse to come over to their side. Their response was satisfactory. Only 12 troopers followed Lt. Palliser, the rest either turned to the rear or went over to the side of Jwala Pershad's troopers. Thus left in the lurch Lt. Palliser was overpowered and knocked off his horse but was saved by a faithful native Rissaldar. This successful rear-guard action by the cavalry enabled the infantry to make good their escape.

The battle of Fatehpur was the first check which Tatya Tope's troops received and its moral effect was naturally great. Their ammunition, baggage and eleven guns fell into the hands of the enemy. The defeat was the result of the faulty information about the enemy's movement and the faulty tactics followed by Jwala Pershad. The latter threw away all the advantages of a strong position by being drawn out of this position by a British reconnoitring party, thus giving battle in an open plain to a strong British force. The result was that in ten minutes the action was decided in favour of the British by the accurate and rapid fire of the British guns and the deadly Enfield rifles. This initial set-back was demoralising in its effects for Jwala Pershad's troops had to fall back on the defensive positions with the loss of some of their guns. Still it must be said to the credit of Jwala Pershad that after this initial set-back he displayed remarkable skill in offering strong opposition and in extricating his force. Thus on the whole though

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\* Ibid

Tatya Tope's troops had failed to check the advance of the British force they had not acquitted themselves badly. The loss of the guns was not a very serious blow for thanks to the Cawnpore magazine Tatya Tope had at his disposal a number of guns, including the heavy ordnance. Of course the possession of the captured guns strengthened the British artillery considerably.

### *Strong Resistance At Aung*

After the loss of Fatehpur Jwala Pershad's force, reinforced by fresh troops, took up position in the village of Aung. It was a strong defensive position. There was an entrenchment in front of the village guarded by two 9-pounders. On both the flanks of the village were walled gardens, thickly studded with trees, affording good shelter to the infantry. Thus Tatya Tope's troops awaited the British attack in this strong defensive position. Meanwhile Havelock's troops, who had been fatigued by a weary march of twenty-four hours and an engagement which had lasted for four hours, had sunk down exhausted on the ground. After a day's rest the column continued its march on July 14. The Irregular Cavalry, whose sympathies were with the nationalist troops, were guarding the baggage. They availed themselves of this opportunity to create a false alarm to drive the baggage train to the rear so that they might plunder it and join Tatya Tope's troops. The attempt however failed and consequently they were disarmed and dismounted. Havelock's force resumed the advance at dawn on July 15 and approached the village of Aung a little after daybreak. They found the village to be held in strength by Tatya Tope's troops.

Havelock's plan was to launch an attack on the entrenched position by an advance guard comprising the Volunteer Cavalry, a detachment of the 64th Regiment and six guns of Maude's battery. The advance guard consisted of about a third of the British force. Havelock took charge of

the rest of the force in the rear to guard the baggage, which was threatened by a swarm of Tatya Tope's horsemen hovering on both the flanks. As the advance guard approached the entrenchment Tatya Tope's two guns opened up and some of his troops came out of the village of Aung and the garden enclosures in perfect skirmishing order and took up position in a village about 200 yards in front of their main position. This was a bold move and showed that Tatya Tope's troops were not content to fight defensive battles but were prepared to take the initiative to strike at the enemy. Soon they were at grips with the Madras Fusiliers. Long and fierce was the struggle—the Madras Fusiliers were attacked not only by the skirmishers but they were also subjected to the fire of the matchlockmen sheltered in the thickly wooded country. It was in this hotly contested engagement that Major Renaud received a mortal wound. While this engagement was going on in front of the entrenchment, Tatya Tope's cavalry was hovering on the flanks and made repeated attempts to attack the rear column commanded by Havelock. Baffled by the fire of the British guns they wheeled to the rear in a bold bid to capture the baggage train — always a vulnerable point of attack — but were discomfited by the musketry fire, and so retired without achieving success. The cavalry attack proved to be a mere demonstration. The issue of the battle was being decided by the infantry engaged in a deadly struggle. The Madras Fusiliers pushed back Tatya's troops from the forward position. The latter fell back behind the entrenchment. The round shot from the British guns and the withering fire of the Enfield rifles began to tell. Tatya Tope's troops were however in no mood to give up their strong position and it was only after a most determined and gallant stand that they were driven out of the entrenched village at the point of the bayonet. They retired to another strong position, which had been prepared near the bridge over the Pandu Nadi.



### *The Vital Bridge*

Tatya Tope was not disheartened by the failure of his troops to check the advance of the British force at Aung. He had yet to play the trump card i.e. to blow up the fine masonry bridge, which spanned the Pandu Nadi. Although the stream was only sixty or seventy yards wide it had been swollen by the rains into a roaring torrent so that it had become impassable. Tatya Tope was fully alive to the strategic importance of the bridge. He had devoted considerable time and attention to its defence. The bridge was defended by entrenchments on the opposite side of the stream. Here were beautifully posted two heavy guns (one 24-pounder gun and one 24-pounder carronade) so as to sweep the bridge and the Grand Trunk Road for 2,000 yards beyond it. Tatya Tope's plan was in fact to defend the bridge as long as possible, and when the entrenched position on the opposite bank became untenable, to blow it up and thus retard considerably the progress of the British force. No flaw can be found with Tatya Tope's plan except that he trusted too much to the skill of his sappers to blow up the bridge. The defence of the bridge was of great importance and Tatya Tope sent a sufficiently strong force under the command of Bala Rao to dispute the passage of the Pandu Nadi.

Havelock too was quite alive to the strategic importance of the bridge. He had no pontoons. Moreover as the natives were hostile it was well-nigh impossible to secure boats to ferry the troops across the swollen stream. Hence he realised the importance of securing the bridge before Tatya Tope's troops attempted to blow it up. Therefore though his troops were exhausted by a five hours' march and a severe action fought in gruelling weather he ordered the column to resume the march after a short rest. After marching for two miles the British force suddenly came under fire from the bridge. Several 24-pound shot, which were very well aimed, came crashing through the British ranks causing casualties. Havelock made a plan of attack,

which was immediately put into effect. Due to a favourable bend of the stream Maude's battery was directed to envelop the bridge in an enfilade fire, while the sharp-shooters (i.e. the Madras Fusiliers armed with the deadly Enfield rifles) were ordered to push on through the ravines, take up positions on the bank above and below the bridge and open a biting fire. The plan was successfully carried out. The guns moved forward and soon three of them were sited in front of the bridge, two on the right and one on the left. It was a bold move. As it was the rainy season, the ground on both sides of the road was heavy and uneven so that when the British guns (unsupported by infantry) advanced to engage the heavy guns of Bala Rao, it was a good opportunity for the native gunners to knock out the British guns, which presented a fair target to their guns. But although the native gunners were quite skilful in operating the guns they had not learnt the trick of depressing them so as to meet advancing troops.\* The round shot from the native guns did not do much damage. Consequently the British guns did not encounter much opposition and soon came into action at 600 yards range. The artillery duel lasted for sometime. Bala Rao's gunners were operating the guns with rapidity but ill luck was in store for them, for both the sponge-staves of their heavy guns were broken. The guns were disabled at a critical moment for the Madras Fusiliers, extended in skirmishing order on the bank of the stream, were harassing Bala Rao's troops by a galling fire, which was particularly directed on the gunners. Without the help of the heavy guns Bala Rao found it impossible to hold an untenable position for long and he therefore ordered the bridge to be blown up, preparatory to falling back on another previously prepared defensive position. A loud explosion was heard and Bala Rao anxiously peered through the vast cloud of dust and smoke to find out whether the sappers had successfully executed the task entrusted to them. Bitter was his chagrin and disappointment for though the parapet

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\* Maude and Sherer, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 52

walls had gone the arch stood sound. The plan to blow up the bridge was in fact unskillfully executed. The British fire on the bridge being exceedingly heavy there was not 'a cool head or a steady hand' among the troops of Bala Rao to carry out this important task. The fire, which the troops of Bala Rao had steadily maintained, suddenly slackened as their heavy guns had been disabled; the Madras Fusiliers therefore swept across amidst a storm of bullets, and captured the guns. They were followed by the infantry in column. Bala Rao's troops, however had by that time retired and fallen back on another strong defensive position.

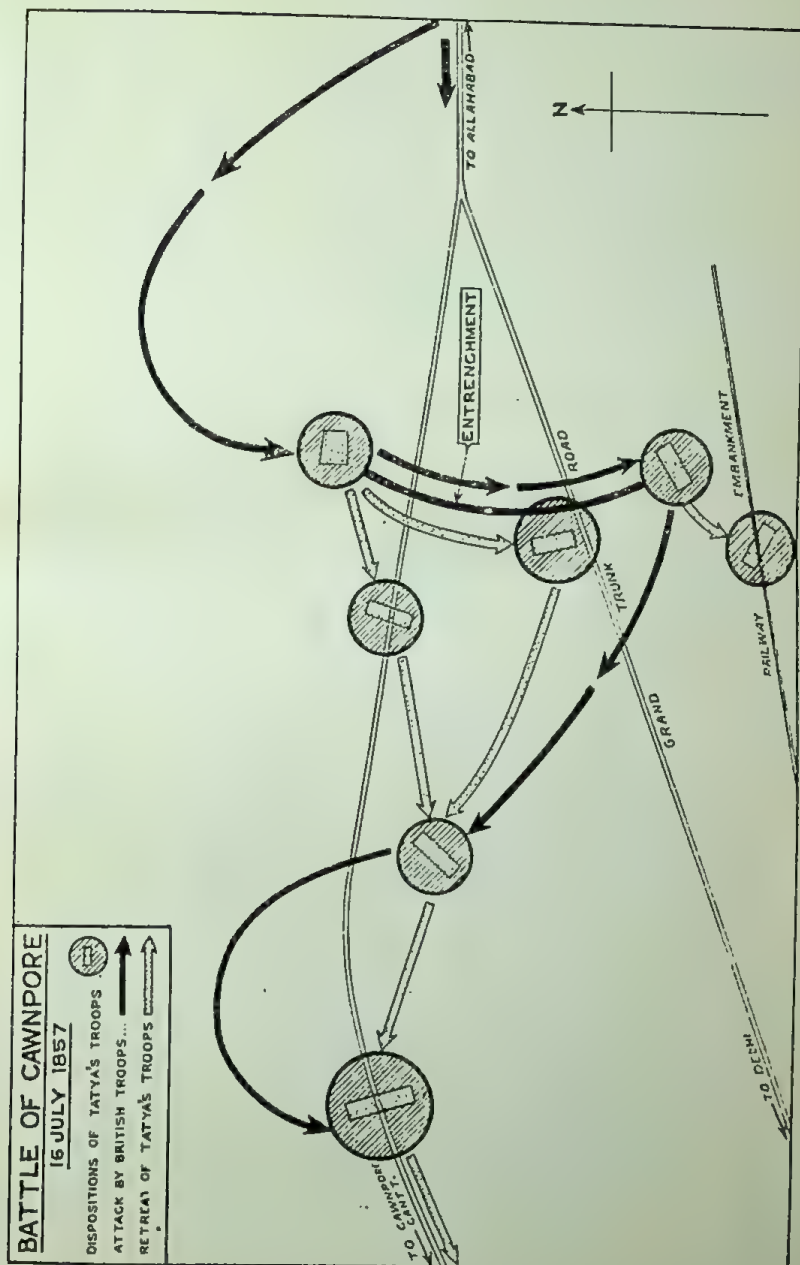
### *Tatya Tope's Military Talent*

Tatya Tope was considerably upset at the failure to blow up the bridge. He had trusted too much to the skill of his sappers and miners to carry out the task successfully. If the bridge had been blown up Havelock's advance to Cawnpore would have been considerably retarded. The failure of the attempt to blow up the vital bridge had serious consequences for it enabled Havelock not only to seize Cawnpore—an important base of operations—but also to make attempts to relieve the Lucknow Residency. The responsibility for the failure to blow up the bridge in time rests squarely on Bala Rao and Tatya Tope, the military adviser of the Nana. What substantial advantage did Tatya Tope hope to gain by delaying the blowing up of the bridge until it was too late to make a successful attempt? The advantage of having momentarily checked the advance of the British force by sweeping the bridge and the Grand Trunk Road by artillery fire was hardly proportionate to that of holding up indefinitely the British advance. It was indeed a tactical blunder not to have blown up the bridge while retiring after sustaining a repulse at the village of Aung. Tatya Tope realised only too well that the battle for Cawnpore was practically lost. Hence his endeavour was to exhaust the British force by a series of engagements and then under cover of the night to slip

away from Cawnpore with the major portion of his forces. So on that fateful day (July 16) Tatyá Tope drew up his army in battle array to check the advance of the British force. The Nana himself was present to encourage the troops and all through the morning his generals were busy deploying their forces. There was hectic activity for the day's fateful events were to decide the main issue whether the Maratha Empire, so recently revived, was to survive or not.

Tatyá Tope and the Nana's able generals—Teeka Singh and Jwala Pershad—showed great skill in selecting a very strong defensive position, some little distance to the south of Cawnpore. Their forces were drawn up in the form of an arc, bisecting the two roads, the road on the right branching off to the Cawnpore Cantonment, and that on the left, the Grand Trunk Road, leading to Delhi. The troops were posted about a mile behind the fork *i.e.* the junction of the roads. Both the roads were cut up and rendered impassable by the entrenchments. This position, which Tatyá Tope selected, was indeed most formidable. The left flank (on the left of the road to the cantonment of Cawnpore) was defended by four 24-pounders. It was covered by the Ganges, a mile distant. The centre (on the right of the above mentioned road) was posted in an entrenched hamlet and was guarded by a 24-pounder howitzer and a 6-pounder. The right flank (on the right of the Grand Trunk Road) rested in a village, encompassed with mango groves and defended by two 9-pounders. Still further to the right was the railroad embankment, which provided a suitable place for defence. Tatyá Tope's appreciation of the situation was that Havelock's force would advance along the Grand Trunk Road to the point where the two roads diverged, about 800 yards in front of his position. Accordingly he had sited his guns so that their fire could be concentrated on the fork. The infantry was massed in support of the guns to defend this strong position. The cavalry was placed in the rear of the left to cover the





left flank. Sir John Kaye was much impressed by the skill shown in the disposition of the troops and wondered as to which of the Nana's generals possessed the military talent to select this strong defensive position. There cannot be any doubt as to who amongst the Nana's able lieutenants possessed this military talent. It was Tatya Tope. The clue to the mystery as to who possessed this military talent is provided by a shrewd British critic, Sir William Hunter, who remarked that whatever little military talent the Nana displayed was due to Tatya Tope.\*

### *Loss Of Defensive Position*

At daybreak on July 16 Havelock's force resumed its march. After covering a distance of sixteen miles they arrived at the village of Maharajpur (six miles from Cawnpore), where they halted for rest and refreshment. Havelock collected information about the dispositions of Tatya Tope's troops. He realised that a frontal attack on Tatya Tope's strong position would, even if successful, entail heavy losses. So that course of action was ruled out. The attack on Tatya Tope's right would also be a costly failure, for here the ground was low and swampy and was moreover commanded by the railway embankment. The only alternative was to attack Tatya Tope's left. This course of action provided certain advantages. There was a thick row of groves in front of Tatya Tope's left, which would provide an admirable screen for a flanking march to attack and turn Tatya Tope's left. Havelock therefore decided to launch the attack on Tatya Tope's left. He further resolved to leave his field hospital, baggage, and camp followers in an enclosure at Maharajpur with a strong guard and two guns. He took grave risks by deviating from sound rules of war. The first risk was that by abandoning all communication with his rear, he was exposing it (i.e. the baggage train) to the attacks of the enemy. The second risk was

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\* Imperial Gazetteer of India (1908) Vol. II, p. 513

even more serious for by his flanking march he would be obliged to fight Tatya Tope's troops with his back to the river. Havelock however found that there was no other alternative to a flanking march in order to turn Tatya's left. Well aware of the dangerous consequences of a repulse, especially when fighting with his back to the river, Havelock took care to acquaint the commanding officers of detachments with the details of his plan of the operations. The plan was for the force to advance three miles along the road; then the main column was to move off to the right under cover of the mango-groves to turn the enemy's left while the Volunteer Cavalry was to advance along the road so as to attract the enemy's attention and cover the flanking movement.

The British force had been exhausted by the tiresome march to Maharajpur. After a halt at that place for two hours the march was resumed at 1-30 p.m. when the sun was frightfully hot. The rays of the fierce sun beat mercilessly on the column and many a British soldier died of sun stroke. Many, unable to keep pace with the column, lagged behind and were later cut to pieces by Tatya Tope's horsemen, who swooped down upon them, when the main British column swerved to the right to make the flanking movement. Still the British force trudged on wearily for three miles along the road and then the main attacking column, favoured by the well-wooded country moved off to the right, while the Volunteer Cavalry continued to advance along the road. The feint succeeded admirably for Tatya Tope's troops fired upon the Volunteer Cavalry, taking it to be the advance guard of the British force. They were quite oblivious to the danger, which was threatening their left flank. The main British column marched unperceived for 1,000 yards under shelter of the mango groves. The Madras Fusiliers, followed by some guns, marched at the head of the column. Next came the 78th and the central battery, under Captain Maude. Then followed the 64th and 84th with two guns. The Ferozepore regiment formed

the rear of the column. Tatya Tope's troops had been taken in by the feint and the British column had taken advantage of the mango-groves to conceal their flanking movement. But when they had gone about a thousand yards a gap in the trees revealed the movement to Tatya Tope's troops. Tatya Tope took energetic steps to meet this threat. He pushed forward a large body of cavalry in support of the threatened left flank and he ordered the gunners to operate their guns with precision and rapidity and rake with deadly fire the advancing British column. The round shot tore through the British ranks, and the British regiments, especially the 64th and 78th, suffered heavy casualties. The artillery fire however failed to check the British advance. The British attacking force fired not a single shot in return but reserved the fire for the final attack. Thus on and on crept the British force through a storm of round shot and shrapnel. The column suffered heavy casualties from the fire of the heavy guns but it succeeded in completely turning the enemy's left flank. Then it advanced to the attack. The 78th, covered by the Madras Fusiliers in skirmishing order, led the attack. The British guns came into action at 900 yards range and commenced to engage Tatya Tope's heavy guns, which were strongly posted and well camouflaged in a lofty hamlet. Tatya Tope's infantry was also well entrenched and kept up a bickering fire. When the British guns failed to silence the well entrenched heavy guns the task of capturing the entrenched position and the guns had to be done by cold steel. Havelock assigned this task to the 78th Highlanders. As the British line advanced in perfect order, Tatya Tope's guns belched forth death and destruction and his matchlockmen fired volleys after volleys. But steadily the Highlanders, with their fixed bayonets, crept forward in spite of a hail of grape that fell thick and fast among them. As they came within a few hundred yards of the guns they encountered heavy fire and were compelled to lie down to avoid being caught in the fierce iron storm. After a short pause Havelock ordered them to rise up and advance. They



rushed in a body upon the battery. Tatya Tope's troops defended the guns with grim determination. Long and fierce was the struggle and at last, unable to save the guns they fell back hurriedly on two positions—some fled along the Cawnpore road and halted at a distance of a few hundred yards in a wooded village (a strong defensive position) while others retired to strengthen the centre against the impending attack. Tatya Tope's left had been turned and all his efforts were now directed to prevent the centre and the right flank from being rolled up by the British attack. The centre was the main objective of the British attack but Tatya Tope's troops in large numbers rallied round a howitzer in an entrenched village. After a short rest the Highlanders, supported by the 64th, led the attack. They charged through the village to capture the gun. Again a desperate hand to hand struggle ensued but Tatya Tope's troops gave way and pulled out to another position in the rear, losing another gun (howitzer) to the enemy. Then the Volunteer Cavalry advanced on the Cawnpore road and charged into the dense masses of the enemy, who were falling back on a strong position in a wooded village near the Cawnpore road. They cut down a few stragglers but had to retire when they came up against stiffening opposition, losing one-third of their numbers. Meanwhile the 64th and 84th, followed by the Sikhs, pushed forward on the left to attack Tatya Tope's right. After a short but fierce struggle, in which they lost two guns, Tatya Tope's troops retired to take up another position behind the railway embankment. It was a strong position for it was covered by a 'jhil' or ditch which separated Tatya Tope's troops from the position occupied by the British troops.

### *Ineffective Counter-attacks*

Though Tatya Tope's troops were driven from the strong defensive position, which they had held in strength, they did not retire in confusion but steadily fell back on two

strong positions. The first and the most important position was the wooded village near the Cawnpore road and the second was behind the railway embankment. The former guarded the Cawnpore road while the latter protected the flank. Now began the second phase of the operations. Tatya Tope realised that the British troops, exhausted as they were by a severe action fought in the gruelling heat of the summer, were not in a position to offer prolonged resistance if he took the initiative in launching counter-attacks. It was indeed a good opportunity for wresting the initiative, for the bullocks were exhausted with dragging the British guns through swamps and over heavy ground. They were scarcely able to move and fell gradually into the rear. The Volunteer Cavalry was assigned the duty of protecting the British guns. Thus the British infantry was left unsupported for the British guns and cavalry had been left in the rear. Tatya Tope seized this favourable opportunity to launch counter-attacks on the enemy's centre and both the flanks. The two companies of the Madras Fusiliers, which were posted on the right flank, were attacked by a swarm of horsemen. The Madras Fusiliers however, forming square, repelled the attacks and cleared the plantation, which was held by Tatya Tope's troops. On the left flank the 64th Regiment, who had taken up position in a tope of trees, where Tatya Tope's troops had made their stand, were subjected to a hot musketry fire from the railway embankment. Captain Maude of the Royal Artillery, who happened to be with the 64th, turned the captured guns upon Tatya Tope's infantry and dispersed them. Tatya Tope's attacks on both the flanks did not succeed. Meanwhile the centre of the British position had come under heavy fire from Tatya Tope's troops entrenched in the wooded village. Havelock realised the imperative necessity of clearing the enemy from this village, guarding as it did the Cawnpore road. So while he ordered the 78th and the 64th to get ready to attack and capture the guns entrenched in the wooded village he directed Captain

Maude to form up his battery in line upon the road and halt there, as that was to be the centre of the British camp. As the two British regiments, the 78th and the 64th, advanced to attack the village they were raked by the fire of the guns and the muskets. But they pushed on and stormed the village. After a desperate resistance Tatya Tope's troops pulled out of the village and took up another position in the rear. Meanwhile the British camp, protected by Maude's guns was threatened by Tatya Tope's cavalry, who tried to envelop it from two sides. They boldly pressed home their attack but were held in check by the fire from the flank guns of Maude's battery. Simultaneously with the attack by the cavalry, the infantry on the railway embankment subjected the rear of the British camp to heavy musketry fire. So Maude had not only to repel the cavalry attacks but he had also to keep a sharp look-out with a couple of guns in the direction of the railway embankment. After about half-an-hour two of Tatya Tope's guns opened up on the British left front and Maude was called upon to silence them with three of his guns at about 1,500 yards range. It was a critical situation for the British gunners for they were "actually facing towards all four fronts of the compass at the same time, all the while being *utterly without support*."\* It was a fine opportunity to capture the British guns, unsupported as they were by infantry. Unfortunately Tatya Tope's troops, particularly the cavalry, did not show enough vigour in pushing home the attack.

### *Victory Turned Into Defeat*

Tatya Tope was baffled but not beaten and he now resolved to make one last desperate effort to check the British advance. His wearied troops, considerably reinforced by fresh troops rallied round a reserve 24-pounder planted on

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\* Maude and Sherer, op. cit. Vol. I, p. 57

the road, flanked by two smaller guns. As the British column approached this position they were subjected to a withering fire from the guns. Tatya Tope's troops were animated with a new hope and courage for Tatya Tope and the Nana had decided to throw in all their reserves in a desperate bid to save Cawnpore. Circumstances were exceptionally favourable for annihilating the British force. As the British column was exposed to a heavy fire from the 24-pounder on the road, and as the artillery cattle, wearied by the length of the march, could not drag the guns to its support, it was an excellent opportunity for Tatya Tope to launch a vigorous attack—the infantry, supported by the guns, to attack the column and the cavalry to wheel to its rear to capture the British guns, unsupported as they were by the infantry. It was indeed a very critical situation for the British force — for their column of infantry was unsupported by the guns, while the latter being about a mile in the rear, were unsupported by infantry. The British troops, exposed as they were to the withering fire from the heavy gun, were ordered to lie down until the British guns could be brought up to neutralise the enemy fire. Thus the British troops lay exposed to the fire of the guns and the musketry while Maude made a great effort to push his guns forward to the succour of the hard pressed infantry. This pause in the advance of the British column emboldened Tatya Tope's troops, who felt confident that they would be able to gain a decisive victory. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds. The clanging of the cymbals intermingled with the shrill blasts of the bugles and the roll of the drums testified to their boundless enthusiasm. The time for launching the attack had arrived. But at this critical moment the cavalry failed to show vigour in attacking the British guns, which unsupported by the infantry, were advancing to the help of the column. Captain Maude rightly remarks: "If the cavalry, who were close to us, had possessed one atom of dash, they could have taken the whole of our eight guns at that moment



without losing a dozen men.”\* The cavalry at this critical moment of the battle showed no energy or vigour in attacking the British artillery with the result that the British guns came to the help of the infantry just at a time when the latter had moved forward to attack and capture the enemy guns. When Havelock found that Tatyá's troops were getting ready to launch the attack he realised that a purely defensive attitude would spell ruin. If the masses of infantry under cover of the artillery fire, launched the attack and it gained momentum it would be difficult for the British infantry, unsupported by the guns, to check it. The only alternative was to take the initiative and to hurl his infantry on the formidable masses of the enemy's infantry. So Havelock did not wait for the arrival of his guns but ordered the troops, who were lying down in a line, to arise and advance for the attack. The British infantry, led by the 64th, advanced steadily to capture the death-dealing battery. Tatyá Tope's gunners did their job well. They sent round shot into the British ranks and when the British line came within a range of three hundred yards, they poured in grape with great precision and determination. But the 64th, in spite of heavy casualties, steadily pushed on straight to the muzzle of the 24-pounder and captured it after a spirited charge. That was the end of the battle for Cawnpore for Tatyá Tope's troops after a hurried fire of musketry, fled in confusion. Maude's battery came up at that moment and completed their discomfiture by a heavy cannonade.

### *Loss of Cawnpore*

Tatyá Tope lost the battle of Cawnpore but by making a determined stand at three important defensive positions on one and the same day he prevented Havelock from reaping the fruits of victory. “A victory without pursuit is no victory at all.” The British troops, exhausted by a wear-

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\* Maude and Sherer, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 58

some march, followed by three severe actions, were not in a position to pursue the beaten enemy. Moreover it was already dark when the battle was finally decided in favour of the British. Therefore under cover of the darkness Tatya Tope's troops succeeded in making good their escape. They crossed into Oudh to swell the ranks of the nationalist troops engaged in besieging the British garrison in the Lucknow Residency. Thus though Tatya Tope lost Cawnpore he was successful in extricating a very large part of his force. Although this force was scattered Tatya Tope helped to rally it soon under the banner of the Nana. Still when every tribute has been paid to the military talent of Tatya Tope for engaging the better trained and more disciplined British troops in a series of keenly contested actions, it has to be confessed that the defeat (July 16) was the heaviest blow the nationalist troops had yet received. The plain fact is that more and more native sepoys were concentrating in Delhi and Lucknow than in Cawnpore. There was no great nationalist leader to co-ordinate the activities of the various forces engaged in fighting isolated battles. The strategic importance of Cawnpore was greater than that of Lucknow. If more reinforcements had been sent to Cawnpore instead of to Lucknow at the beginning of the war, the story of the battle of Cawnpore would have had a different ending. Sound strategy dictated that only a small part of the nationalist force should have carried on the siege of the Lucknow Residency and the rest should have been sent to prevent Cawnpore from falling into the hands of the British force. With Cawnpore secured the British force could carry out operations against Lucknow, Oudh and the North-West Provinces. Every effort therefore ought to have been made to prevent the British force from securing this important base of operations. With sufficient reinforcements Tatya Tope would have probably succeeded in checking the British advance. As it was he hardly got sufficient time to consolidate his position. After the capitulation of the British garrison on June 26, he just got about three weeks to prepare for the defence of Cawnpore. It was just sufficient

for him to infuse his troops with his own enthusiasm and to restore some sort of discipline among the hordes of armed retainers, which the local zemindars brought to his help. He admirably planned the defence of Cawnpore and if his cavalry had shown more vigour and courage he would have probably succeeded in annihilating the British force.

## Chapter IV

# A NATION IN ARMS

### *Strategic Importance of Delhi*

ON July 1, 1857 the Nana had been proclaimed the Peshwa and about two weeks later (July 16) his dream of re-establishing the Maratha Empire had vanished into thin air. Was it simply because the Nana and Tatya Tope, his military adviser, lacked the ability to stabilise their empire or was it that there were certain extraneous factors which contributed to their failure? More than anything else it was the faulty strategy followed by the nationalist leaders which led to the loss of Cawnpore. It is therefore necessary to understand what were the forces at work and how they were harnessed by the nationalist leaders. A proper appreciation of the achievements and failures of Tatya Tope can only be made in the context of the stirring events which were happening in other parts of India.

The three chief nationalist strongholds were Delhi, Cawnpore and Lucknow. Of these Delhi was by far the most important. The nationalist leaders, as well as the British authorities, realised fully that the main issue of the struggle would be decided in Delhi. Delhi had been the capital of India for more than seven centuries and was covered with a halo of glory. The tide of the fortunes of the ruling dynasties had ebbed and flowed around Delhi. It would be interesting therefore to find out whether the nationalist leaders, who were alive to the importance of maintaining their hold over Delhi, took effective steps to rush reinforcements from different parts of the country to this city of such great strategic importance. It must be



admitted that they spared no efforts to retain the possession of Delhi.

### *The Lead Given by the Sepoys at Aligarh*

The momentous events at Meerut and Delhi had far-reaching consequences for they set in motion powerful forces for the freedom of the country. The country was in ferment. The first repercussions were felt in Aligarh, situated on the route from Agra to Delhi. A native infantry regiment, which was quartered at Aligarh with detachments at Bulandshahr, Mainpuri and Etawah, broke loose from British control. The incident which provoked this crisis happened on May 20. A Brahmin engaged in winning over the sepoys at Aligarh to the nationalist side was arrested by the British authorities and executed before the assembled sepoys. One of the sepoys boldly stepped forward from the ranks and pointing to the dangling corpse exclaimed in a tone of anguish: "Behold a martyr to our religion." This emotional appeal had the desired effect. As if struck by the wand of a magician the sepoys shook off their chains of bondage and swung over to the nationalist side. They proudly marched to Delhi.

### *The Bareilly Brigade's march to Delhi*

A very important contribution to the nationalist cause was made by Rohilkhand, one of the principal Commissionerships of the North-West Provinces. It comprised four districts, which were named after the towns of Bareilly, Moradabad, Shahjahanpur, Budaun and Bijnor. Bareilly, the capital of Rohilkhand, was only 152 miles from Delhi, and was thus in a position to play an important part in the defence of that city. Circumstances were favourable. The turbulent Rohilla Pathans, led by a remarkable leader, Khan Bahadur Khan, eagerly seized this opportunity to throw off the British yoke and to carve out an independent principality for themselves. It was fortunate for the

nationalist cause that the brigade, which had its headquarters at Bareilly, took an active part in the nationalist struggle. The garrison of Rohilkhand, which consisted of four regiments of Native Infantry, one regiment of Irregular Cavalry, and a native battery of artillery, was distributed mainly between Bareilly, Shahjahanpur and Moradabad; Budaun being garrisoned by only one company of a Native Infantry Regiment. There were no European troops in Rohilkhand and therefore the Bareilly Brigade had a free hand in strengthening the nationalist movement. On May 19 the sepoys at Moradabad gave the lead which was followed by the sepoys at Bareilly, Shahjahanpur and Budaun on May 31. The British authority in Rohilkhand was at an end. Khan Bahadur Khan was proclaimed the King of Delhi's 'Viceregent' in Rohilkhand. He was ably assisted in the task of administration by Mubarak Shah, a wealthy and influential Pathan, and Sobha Ram, the Dewan. Bukht Khan, the Subedar of Artillery assumed the command of the Bareilly Brigade. The brigade left for Delhi and made a notable contribution to its defence. Bukht Khan, the talented commander of the brigade, soon made his influence felt and was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the nationalist forces in Delhi. It was a signal honour and richly did he deserve it for he showed considerable energy in organising the defence of Delhi.

### *Contributions of Sappers and Miners*

A very valuable contribution to the nationalist cause was made by the Sappers and Miners. The Sappers and Miners of the Bengal Army consisted of ten companies of sepoys. Their headquarters was at Roorkee, on the Ganges Canal, not far from Meerut. When they moved towards Meerut the majority of them managed to escape to Delhi. Such an addition of trained men to the nationalist force was undoubtedly invaluable. They played a very important part in the defence of Delhi for they constructed and kept in repair the defensive works, which frustrated the

British attempts to capture Delhi. A typical incident will show the invaluable service which they rendered to the nationalist cause. On one occasion due to the concentrated fire of the British guns on a certain bastion the guns of the nationalist force were disabled and the face of the works was demolished. It was decided to launch an assault in the morning. But at the break of day the British troops were amazed to find that the Indian sappers had repaired the demolished face of the works and a large number of guns were sending their shot into the British batteries with unerring aim.\*

### *Poor contribution of Agra*

Agra made a comparatively poor contribution to the nationalist cause. The strong fort of Agra, situated on the right bank of the Jumna, about a hundred and fifty miles from Delhi, overlooked the river and the city. The garrison of Agra, commanded by Brigadier Polwhele, consisted of one British regiment—the 3rd Bengal European Regiment—two regiments of Native Infantry, and a field battery of Bengal Artillery. Detachments of the two regiments of Native Infantry were stationed at Muttra, which commanded the roadway and the waterway to Delhi. John Colvin, the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces summoned to his help the Kotah Contingent and the Bharatpur Horse. On May 30 two companies of the Native Infantry Regiments were sent from Agra to Muttra to take charge of the treasure and escort it to Agra. On their arrival these companies and another company stationed at Muttra mutinied and marched to Delhi taking with them the treasure. The British officers ordered the Bharatpur troops to attack them. The latter refused to obey the order, turned the guns on the British officers and compelled them to seek safety in flight. Colvin got alarmed at this turn of events and decided to disarm the two Native

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\* C.F. Atkinson: **The Campaign in India** (London 1859)

Infantry Regiments at Agra. A parade was held and the two Native Infantry Regiments were so posted as to be under the fire of the British troops. At the word of command 'Pile arms' the native sepoy's hesitated for a moment and then sullenly surrendered their arms.

### *Reinforcements from Hansi*

The neighbouring territories of Delhi contributed their quota to the defence of Delhi. The 4th Bengal Irregular Cavalry and the Hariana Light Infantry, quartered at Hansi, Hissar and Sirsa to the north-west of Delhi joined the nationalist forces in Delhi in June 1857.

### *Patriotic Zeal*

The nationalist forces had thus secured initial advantages. However they met with a set-back in the Punjab. The hopes of the nationalists rested on the Bengal Regular Native Regiments which numbered 36,000 men. Would they strike a blow for the independence of their country in time? The native sepoy's of the Bengal Army were straining at the leash but they were powerless to help their brethren in Delhi for the province was garrisoned by about 10,000 British troops, who, supported by the Punjab Irregular Force, proved more than a match for them. The nationalist cause triumphed in those places which had been denuded of the British troops. But this very fact that certain provinces had been denuded of British troops to strengthen the British garrison of the Punjab proved to be the undoing of the nationalist cause. For the failure to convert the Punjab into a nationalist stronghold had serious consequences. The Punjab became a base of operations for the British force engaged in the recapture of Delhi. The Indian sepoy's of the Bengal Army, who made desperate efforts to escape to Delhi, had to deal not only with the British troops but also men of a different calibre at the helm of affairs in the Punjab. Sir John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner, and his able coadjutors, were men of great energy and



resolution, who were determined to retain their hold on the province full of virile martial races. The British authorities in the Punjab in fact took energetic steps to disarm the regular native regiments suspected of nationalist leanings. The first of the effective disarming parades was held on May 13 at Mian Mir, the cantonment situated at a distance of six miles from the city of Lahore. The Native sepoy at Mian Mir consisted of the 8th Bengal Light Cavalry and three Native Infantry Regiments. The British force comprised an infantry regiment and two troops of the Bengal Horse Artillery. By a skilful manoeuvre on the parade-ground the Native sepoy found themselves confronting the loaded artillery. When the order was given 'Pile arms' there was a moment's hesitation and then some 3,500 muskets and 500 sabres rattled to the ground. By this timely and energetic action the British authorities prevented the Punjab from becoming a nationalist stronghold.\* The Native sepoy who were disarmed at Mian Mir were however so much carried away by patriotic fervour as to make desperate efforts to escape to Delhi. They knew that their chances of success were slight. Yet they willingly sacrificed their lives in a bold bid to escape to Delhi. It was on July 30 that some of them got this chance. One of the disarmed regiments (the 26th Native Infantry) had secretly collected knives and axes. Thus wretchedly armed they dared to defy the superior British force. They killed the commanding officer and succeeded in effecting an escape but were pursued and utterly annihilated. They were the true martyrs—they knew that they would pay the penalty with their lives if this mad-cap adventure failed. They perished but their memory will ever be green in the hearts of their countrymen.

### *Ferozepore's quota of reinforcements*

Events at Ferozepore were also moving to a crisis. Ferozepore was a place of great strategic importance for it

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\* A. C. Taylor: **General Sir Alex Taylor** (1913), Vol. I, p. 165

contained an arsenal and a magazine. The garrison consisted of two Native Infantry Regiments (the 45th Bengal Native Infantry and the 57th Bengal Native Infantry) and a regiment of Native Cavalry (the 10th Bengal Light Cavalry). The British force consisted of an infantry regiment and two companies of European artillery. On May 13 one of the native infantry regiments (the 45th) made a bold attempt to seize the magazine. The attempt failed. Then they tried to seize the regimental magazines. Their efforts however did not succeed because the Brigadier took timely action and blew up the magazines. At the same time the Brigadier took steps to disarm the sepoys of the other native regiments. The 45th Native Infantry however marched to Delhi. They were pursued by a small British force but the majority of them succeeded in escaping to Delhi. On August 14 the men of the 10th Light Cavalry, who had been disarmed and dismounted, succeeded in recovering some of their horses, and in escaping to Delhi.

### *Death preferred to slavery*

A bold attempt was made by a Native Infantry Regiment (the 55th Bengal Native Infantry) to set ablaze the Peshawar valley. On May 20 a detachment of this regiment at Nowshera mutinied and marched to Hoti Mardan, where was stationed the rest of the regiment. The whole of the Peshawar valley would have been in turmoil if their lead had been followed by the sepoy regiments at Peshawar. That the attempt failed was chiefly due to the energy shown by the British authorities at Peshawar. By a rare coincidence some of the ablest British officers were guarding the North-West Frontier of India—Herbert Edwardes was the Commissioner, and John Nicholson the Deputy Commissioner, Brigadier Sydney Cotton commanded the Peshawar Brigade and Neville Chamberlain commanded the Punjab Irregular Force. The garrison of Peshawar consisted of 2,000 British soldiers, 8,000 sepoys, 18 guns and a field battery. Before the sepoys could take the initiative

the British authorities at Peshawar held a disarming parade and disarmed four out of the seven sepoy regiments suspected to have nationalist leanings. And shortly afterwards they despatched a column, which pursued and annihilated the 55th Bengal Native Infantry which had mutinied at Nowshera and Hoti Mardan. Such was the patriotic fervour of the sepoys however that the men of one of the sepoy regiments (the 51st Bengal Native Infantry) collected and concealed arms in their lines, rose in revolt on August 25 and though wretchedly armed fought for two days until they perished to a man. They preferred death to slavery.

### *At the altar of freedom*

A sepoy regiment at Jhelum (the 14th Bengal Native Infantry) preferred to sacrifice itself at the altar of the freedom of the country rather than tamely submit to be disarmed by the British troops. On June 9 a small British force approached Jhelum to disarm them. They put up a heroic fight. It was only after a fierce struggle that they were driven out of the quarter-guard. Then they took up position in a village. When the British force advanced to attack them it encountered such fierce resistance that it was compelled to beat a hasty retreat. The sepoys escaped during the night. Very few of them however succeeded in reaching Delhi.

### *Carts filled with blank ammunition*

Though the British troops held the province in their grip the Native sepoys did not desist from making efforts to escape to Delhi. A very successful attempt was made on June 7 at Jullundur, where three sepoy regiments gave the slip to the British force consisting of an infantry regiment and artillery. Picking up another regiment at Phillaur they made their way towards the ford at the Sutlej in order to capture Ludhiana, which was reputed to be provided with artillery, arms and 1,000 barrels of gunpowder. The sepoys

very well realised the strategic importance of Ludhiana, commanding as it did the two highways to Delhi—the road from the arsenal of Ferozepore, and the road from the arsenal of Phillaur. That the sepoy did not succeed in seizing this important place was due to an unfortunate incident. After leaving Jullundur the sepoy emptied their regimental magazines, but instead of ball cartridges they filled their carts with *blank* ammunition. Ignorant of this mistake they marched until they were checked at the ford near Phillaur by a small force led by George Ricketts, the Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana. After firing a few rounds the sepoy discovered to their horror that they were using blank ammunition. The small force under Ricketts however retired soon afterwards having expended its ammunition. The sepoy put on a bold front, stayed at Ludhiana for a short time and then by forced marches succeeded in reaching Delhi.

### *Nicholson's mailed fist*

Other sepoy regiments did not succeed in their efforts to escape to Delhi because a strong movable column was overawing likely nationalist strongholds. At first Neville Chamberlain commanded this column but on June 22 Nicholson assumed its command. The movable column consisted of one British Regiment, a troop of Horse Artillery, Bouchier's battery, one sepoy regiment (the 33rd Native Infantry) and one wing of the native cavalry (the 9th Native Cavalry). On his way to Jullundur, Nicholson picked up at Hoshiarpur a sepoy regiment (the 35th Native Infantry). From Jullundur the column went to Phillaur where on June 25 by a skilful manoeuvre the two native regiments (the 33rd and the 35th), which were planning to escape to Delhi, were disarmed. Nicholson then marched to Amritsar and disarmed the 59th Native Infantry. About the same time other regiments (the 3rd, 4th and 58th Bengal Native Infantry) were disarmed at other stations. Nicholson cowed down the province with his mailed fist.



*A daring attempt at escape*

Even the mailed fist however cannot cow down a determined people for long. A daring attempt to escape to Delhi was made by the sepoy regiments at Sialkot (a wing of the 9th Bengal Light Cavalry and the 46th Bengal Native Infantry). It was a favourable opportunity, for the British troops at Sialkot had been sent to reinforce the movable column with the result that there were only fifty Europeans to keep in check nearly a thousand sepoys, all armed and ready for action. On July 9 the sepoys rose in revolt and planned to give the slip to Nicholson by pushing on towards Gurdaspur, where they hoped to be reinforced by Jackson's irregulars, the 59th from Kangra and the 4th Native Infantry from Nurpur. Thus reinforced they could move to Amritsar and Jullundur and pick up the three disarmed regiments—the 33rd, the 35th and the 54th Bengal Native Infantry. It was a daring plan but it did not succeed for Nicholson, anticipating this move on their part hurried to Gurdaspur and fell upon them on July 12 at Trimmu Ghat (a ford eight miles from Gurdaspur) where they had crossed the Ravi. They fought gallantly and not only kept up an incessant fire of musketry but also flung themselves with heroic courage on the nine British guns. But all in vain. Neither their heroic courage nor their gallant attack could avert defeat for they were terribly outmatched. Equipped with inferior weapons—the Brown Bess and the old station-gun—they were called upon to face the deadly fire of the British batteries and the rifles. The struggle was too unequal to last long. After this repulse the sepoy force, shattered but not destroyed, fell back on another position. The sudden floods in the river protected them till July 16, when they were attacked and annihilated. So that was the tragic end of the sepoy regiments of Sialkot.

*Failure to secure the arsenal of Ajmer*

The contributions made by Rajputana were substantial. The chief interest centred round Ajmer, which contained

an arsenal large enough to supply the troops in the whole of Rajputana, the cantonment of Nasirabad (situated at a distance of 15 miles from Ajmer), and the cantonment of Nimach (about 120 miles from Nasirabad). General George Lawrence, Agent to the Governor-General in Rajputana, showed considerable energy in tackling the situation. Two companies of a Native Infantry Regiment (the 15th Native Infantry) guarded the arsenal. Before the sepoys could make up their mind to seize the arsenal they were removed to Nasirabad and replaced by a loyal detachment from the Mhairwarra Battalion at Beawar, about 32 miles south-west of Nasirabad. A unique opportunity was missed by the nationalist troops to secure the great arsenal. There were no British troops in Rajputana and therefore if the two companies of the 15th Native Infantry had dared to seize the arsenal they would have rendered a very important service to the nationalist cause.

### *Nasirabad Brigade's March to Delhi*

Although the arsenal at Ajmer was not secured effective steps were taken to rush reinforcements to Delhi from Nasirabad and Nimach. The garrison of Nasirabad consisted of the 1st Bombay Cavalry, two Bengal Native Infantry Regiments (the 15th and the 30th Bengal Native Infantry) and a Native Field Battery. On May 28 the sepoys of the infantry regiments seized the guns. The British officers hoped that the troopers of the Bombay Cavalry would remain loyal. The cavalry was formed in rear of the artillery lines, and ordered to charge by squadrons. "They charged, but the men, as soon as they got within a few yards of the guns, went threes about, and allowed their officers to go on — if they pleased."\* Some of them did go on with the result that two were killed and two severely wounded. The British officers escaped to Beawar, while the sepoys, after plundering the cantonment, marched towards Delhi.

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\* I. T. Pritchard: *The Mutinies in Rajpootana* (London 1860) p. 49

dency. If a large part of this force had rallied to the support of the Nana and Tatyá Tope at Cawnpore, the disastrous consequences of the loss of this important base would have been averted.

## Chapter V.

### THE MAN OF DESTINY

#### *Tatya Tope's Plan*

AFTER the loss of Cawnpore on July 16 the Nana along with Tatya Tope, his military adviser, and other supporters escaped to Fatehpur Churasi in Oudh. The greater portion of the troops in Cawnpore escaped to Oudh and helped to swell the nationalist force engaged in the siege of the Lucknow Residency. It was apparent that Havelock would make an earnest effort to relieve the Residency. Tatya Tope's plan was therefore to collect a large force at Bithur and recapture Cawnpore, while the British force was engaged in the operations for the relief of the Residency. It was an admirable plan and showed that Tatya Tope was a great strategist. Unfortunately the plan could not be successfully implemented because the assumption on which it was based proved to be wrong. Tatya Tope calculated that the British force would be kept engaged by the nationalist troops in Lucknow sufficiently long to enable him to launch the attack on Cawnpore. Unfortunately Havelock refused to swallow the bait and frightened by the tough resistance which he encountered, he beat a hasty retreat and was thus back in Cawnpore before Tatya Tope was prepared to attack it. Tatya Tope had by that time been able to build up a strong force of 4,000 men consisting of the sepoy of the three Bengal Infantry Regiments—the 17th, the 42nd and the 31st. The Cavalry consisted of troopers of the 2nd Light Cavalry and the 3rd Irregulars. In addition there was a portion of the Nana's troops. With this force and two guns Tatya Tope took possession of Bithur and prepared to strike a blow for the recovery of



Cawnpore. But before Tatya Tope could carry out his plan Havelock returned to Cawnpore resolved to destroy his force. To understand clearly why Havelock unexpectedly returned to Cawnpore (thus upsetting Tatya Tope's plan) instead of pushing on boldly for the relief of the Residency it is necessary to bear in mind the difficulties which he had to encounter.

### *Bravery of the Oudh Gunners*

After capturing Cawnpore on July 17 Havelock waited for fresh reinforcements before resuming his advance on Lucknow. Three days later Brigadier-General Neill arrived from Allahabad with a detachment of 270 men. As Havelock could spare only 300 men for the defence of Cawnpore, while he led his force for the relief of the Lucknow Residency, he took precautions to select a suitable place, on the bank of the Ganges near the bridge-of-boats, to serve as an entrenchment against sudden attack. Thus assured about the defences of Cawnpore, Havelock collected boats (the bridge-of-boats having been destroyed by the Nana's troops) so that by July 25 his whole force, comprising 1,500 men and ten light guns crossed the Ganges and moved forward on July 26 to the village of Mangalwar, about six miles distant from the river. Next day the advance was resumed. The nationalist troops were holding in strength the town of Unao, hardly three miles off. They displayed considerable skill in the selection of a suitable defensive position. The heavy rains had covered the country around with marshes and swamps; taking advantage of this favourable factor they so designed their defensive position that it could not be outflanked. That was indeed a great advantage for the position could only be stormed by a frontal attack. The nationalist troops held in strength the town of Unao and a small village forward of it. Their right was protected by a swamp, which could neither be forced nor turned. The centre was strongly held — here the village, whose walls were loopholed, had been strongly

fortified. The advance guard in front of the centre occupied a garden enclosure, which had been fortified so as to serve as a bastion. Only a narrow path led from the village to the town of Unao, which extended three-quarters of a mile on their left. Thus their left was also strongly held; on account of the flooded country around, it was not possible to force or turn their left. Havelock realised that there was no alternative to launching a frontal attack on the strongly fortified position. The attack was launched by the 78th Highlanders and the 1st Madras Fusiliers, supported by two guns. After a desperate struggle the nationalist troops were driven from the garden enclosure to the village. As the British troops advanced to attack the village they were subjected to a destructive musketry fire from the loopholed houses. The bullets flew thick and fast and the British troops failed to force an entry into the village. They were then reinforced by the 64th. Every house was defended with obstinate courage. The murderous fire from one house in particular worked havoc in the British ranks. This house was stormed and captured only after heavy casualties. Still the desperate struggle continued from house to house. The village was set on fire but still the nationalist troops did not give in and carried on the heroic struggle until they were dislodged by artillery shells bursting in their midst. Their guns were captured but they escaped to the town of Unao.

The nationalist troops in the town of Unao were considerably reinforced by fresh troops and guns. Havelock took up position on a spot of dry ground between the village, which he had just cleared of the nationalist troops, and the town of Unao. It was a very advantageous position for the road was surrounded by a swamp and there was no other alternative for the nationalist troops except to advance along the road to attack the British force. Havelock planted the guns so that they could sweep the road with their fire. The nationalist troops made the mistake of advancing in dense masses thus presenting a good target

to the guns. Havelock reserved his fire till the nationalist troops were well within range. The musketry fire and the grape from the guns took a heavy toll of the nationalist troops. They could not stand this murderous fire for long and broke and fled in confusion, thus unmasking 15 guns, which though unsupported by infantry, belched forth death and destruction amongst the British troops. The Oudh, gunners, highly trained soldiers, maintained the conflict with singular obstinacy and perished fighting round the guns.

### *A Keenly Contested Action*

Although the nationalist troops suffered a repulse at the first action of Unao (July 29) yet they had given a good account of themselves. The heroic stand which they made in the village and the stubborn valour of their gunners created a profound impression on the mind of Havelock, who realised that it would not be an easy task to drive them from Lucknow. This lesson was still further brought home to him by another keenly contested action at Bushirat Gunj (July 29) six miles further off towards Lucknow. Here again the nationalist troops showed great skill in the selection of a strong defensive position. The walled town was intersected by the high road to Lucknow. In its rear was a broad sheet of water, over which the road was carried by a causeway. The main gate, at the entrance of the town, was well defended by an earthwork, a trench, and four guns. It was flanked on each side by loopholed turrets and walls. It was further completely covered by a large building within the town\*. It was indeed a position of great strength and Havelock realised that an attempt to launch a frontal attack, unless supported by a flanking movement, would cause heavy losses. His plan was to plant three guns on the high road to cannonade the earthwork

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\* John Clark Marshman: *Memoirs of Major-General Havelock* (London 1890), p. 332

and the gateway in front. At the same time guns placed on the flank were to direct converging fire on the same point. Under cover of the artillery fire the 78th Highlanders and the Madras Fusiliers were to storm the gateway while the 64th were to wheel to the left, and marching round the town were to take up position between the farther gate and the causeway to cut off the retreat of the nationalist troops. The 84th and the Sikhs were to be in reserve—ready to support the frontal or the flank attack according to the circumstances. The battle commenced with an artillery duel which lasted for sometime. Then the Highlanders and the Fusiliers moved forward to attack but they were held up by the effective fire of the guns. The iron storm which burst upon them was so severe that they were ordered to lie down while the British artillery tried to silence the troublesome guns. When the fire of the guns was subdued the Highlanders and the Madras Fusiliers made a wild charge. The nationalist troops were disheartened by the impetuosity of the charge, as well as by the flanking movement. Abandoning the guns they fled through the town and over the causeway. They had taken care to keep safe their line of communication; by a well-directed fire from the walls they had checked the advance of the 64th with the result that the flanking column failed in its mission of cutting off their retreat. Thus although they sustained a defeat and lost their guns they were able to escape from the town in safety.

### *Difficult Situation Facing Havelock*

The two actions of Unao and Bushirat Gunj fought on one and the same day (July 29) revealed to Havelock the gravity of the situation. During these keenly contested actions the British force had sustained eighty-eight casualties. The fighting strength of the British force was still further reduced by heavy mortality due to cholera and dysentery. A sixth of the British force had perished and a third of the gun ammunition had been expended. Only



one day's fighting had revealed to Havelock the temper of the nationalist troops. The troops who fought in barricaded houses amidst blazing fires, when the village had been set on fire, and the gunners who died fighting to the last in defence of their guns, could not be merely mercenary troops. Suddenly, as in a flash, the bitter truth dawned on Havelock—the men who fought so valiantly and so courageously were inspired by nationalist fervour to rid the country of the foreign yoke. That alone could account for the fanatic zeal they displayed in defence of the vital posts, which they had occupied. Thirty-thousand nationalist troops still barred his way to Lucknow. To push on to Lucknow through the serried ranks of the nationalist troops would be nothing but to court disaster. Further Havelock found to his consternation that his line of communication was in grave peril of being cut off. Tatya Tope's troops, 4,000 strong and ably led, could swoop down on Cawnpore from Bithur and seize his base of operations. Further 3,000 sepoys at Dinapore had made an important contribution to the struggle, which was being waged by the nationalist troops to protect Lucknow. These troops under the leadership of Kunwar Singh, a local zemindar, were threatening to cut off the communication with Calcutta. No commander can afford to see his base of operations fall into the hands of the enemy and his line of communication cut off. This dangerous threat to his base and line of communication, coupled with the stubborn valour of the nationalist troops, convinced Havelock that the task of capturing Lucknow was beyond his limited resources. He well knew the repercussions of a retrograde movement for that would be interpreted as a sign of weakness and would encourage the waverers to throw in their lot with the nationalist troops. But Havelock was a realist and he faced unpleasant facts by resolving to return to Mangalwar to wait for fresh reinforcements. On August 3 he was reinforced by a company of the 84th and Olphert's half-battery. These reinforcements fell far short of his expectations. The British authorities at Calcutta, alarmed by the mutiny

of the three native regiments at Dinapore withheld the reinforcements—the 5th Fusiliers and the 90th Foot—which had been originally earmarked for the relief of Lucknow. 3,000 armed and disciplined troops from Dinapore now swelled the ranks of the nationalist force engaged in the task of cutting off the British line of communication with Calcutta. Thus the European troops—the 5th Fusiliers and the 90th Foot — were detained to keep under control Western Bihar and to keep open the line of communication with Calcutta. The mutiny of the sepoys at Dinapore considerably helped the nationalist troops at Lucknow by preventing British troops from being sent to strengthen Havelock's force.

### *Another Contested Action*

Bitter was the disappointment of Havelock for instead of receiving two European regiments he received from Cawnpore only 257 men. Still he thought of again testing the enemy defences at Bushirat Gunj, which the nationalist troops had re-occupied. On August 4 Havelock moved from Mangalwar and halted at a place, about a mile beyond Unao. In the morning on August 5 the march was resumed and the second battle of Bushirat Gunj was fought. This time Havelock made use of a strip of land beyond the marsh to his right. His plan was simple but effective. Two heavy guns (24-pounders) and two 24-pounder howitzers were to advance along the road and play on the defences in front. After the enemy fire was subdued the 64th and the 84th were to storm the gate. At the same time a strong column was to carry out the flanking movement on the right so as to sweep round the town and take up position behind it, between the farther gate and the causeway. The turning force consisted of the 78th Highlanders, the 1st Madras Fusiliers, and the Sikhs, supported by Maude's battery, and a troop of the Volunteer Cavalry. The heavy guns were pushed along the road and cannonaded the gate from a range of 300 yards. The heavy cannonade,

as well as the flanking movement disconcerted the nationalist troops who tried to escape by the causeway. They were subjected to the withering fire of the turning column and suffered casualties. But they managed to escape over the causeway and took up position in the village of Bijapuri and in another village on the left of the causeway. Havelock ordered the 84th to attack the village on the left of the causeway and the Madras Fusiliers to clear Bijapuri village of the nationalist troops. After a tough resistance the two villages were captured. The nationalist troops fell back on another strong position at Nawabgunj, at a distance of five miles.

### *Havelock's Return to Cawnpore*

Havelock received an alarming report from Neill about the situation at Cawnpore. Tatya Tope was preparing to launch an attack on Cawnpore and therefore Neill urged on Havelock the desirability of returning to Cawnpore immediately. Havelock returned to Mangalwar. He ordered the engineers to build a bridge-of-boats. This bridge was completed by August 11. On that day Havelock received an urgent call for help from Neill, who was apprehensive of an attack on Cawnpore by Tatya Tope's troops. But before retiring to Cawnpore Havelock wanted to wipe out the disgrace of the retrograde movement by some spirited action. So he marched on Bushirat Gunj, which had been re-occupied by the nationalist troops. On August 11 after gaining some advantage over the nationalist troops he retraced his steps to Mangalwar, and returned to Cawnpore on August 13, having failed to make any impression on the strong nationalist force of Lucknow.

### *Tatya Tope's Strong Defensive Position*

Although Havelock's force had been considerably reduced by casualties and heavy mortality due to cholera and dysentery, he could not afford to let Tatya Tope build up his force at Bithur, so near to Cawnpore. Therefore he lost no

time in marching at the head of his force to Bithur to remove this dangerous threat to his base of operations. In the morning on August 16, leaving Neill with only a hundred men at Cawnpore, Havelock marched to Bithur at the head of a force composed of some 750 Europeans and 250 Sikhs. Tatya Tope awaited the approach of the British force with quiet confidence. He showed considerable skill in the selection of a suitable defensive position. The main position, consisting of thick ramparts and flanked by entrenched quadrangles, was held in strength. Connected by earthworks were two villages, one on either flank. These villages, as well as the town of Bithur, served as a support to the main position. In front of this strong position was a plain covered with dense plantations of sugarcane and castor oil, interspersed with villages. Thus the plantations afforded excellent cover to the infantry. There was a nulla or rivulet, not fordable, which flowed in front of the town. It could be crossed only by a narrow stone bridge, well defended by a breastwork on its flank. Thus the defensive position, which Tatya Tope had selected, was very strong.

### *Sluggish Resistance at Bithur*

When the British column, after a weary march of eight hours, approached this defensive position, Tatya Tope sent his cavalry to reconnoitre the enemy position. When the cavalry hovered on the left flank of the British force a few shells from the guns dispersed them, unmasking the two guns, which at once returned the fire. Havelock quickly made a plan to advance in direct echelon from his right. The 78th Highlanders, the Madras Fusiliers and Maude's battery formed the right wing, while the 64th, the 84th, the Sikhs, and Olphert's battery constituted the left wing. The Fusiliers were moving in extended order on the extreme right when they were subjected to a sharp fire from some high cultivation, and a village, which had been concealed by it. Their commander at once wheeled two companies to the right. Thus strengthened the Fusiliers engaged in a



hand to hand conflict with Tatya Tope's troops. The latter fought gallantly and even crossed bayonets with the Fusiliers. But after a hard struggle they fell back on the strong defensive position. From behind the entrenchment Tatya Tope's gunners operated their two guns with admirable precision. Fourteen British guns, including the 24-pounders, played on the entrenchment but could not silence the two guns, which continued to be admirably served by the gunners. When the British guns, drawn by the slow moving bullocks, moved forward to within 40 yards of the entrenchment the fire was smartly returned by Tatya Tope's guns. The British guns were still not able to silence the well-camouflaged guns. On the other hand not only were the two guns well served by the gunners, but also masses of infantry, sheltered behind the breastwork, sent forth a tempest of bullets, which swept through the British ranks. The enemy fire was so severe that it evoked the remark from Havelock that he had seen nothing to equal it since the day of Ferozeshah, when the Sikhs had offered stout resistance in the First Sikh War. Havelock realised the futility of returning the fire. The work had to be done with cold steel. Hence he ordered the 78th Highlanders and the Madras Fusiliers to move off to the right and screened by sugar-cane plantations to emerge on the left of the breastwork and storm it. This movement was skilfully executed. The British infantry successfully stormed the breastwork and captured the guns after a bitter struggle. Tatya Tope's troops fled over the bridge to the town. The British soldiers were too exhausted to pursue them. Meanwhile the remaining portion of the British force drove Tatya Tope's troops out of some sugar-cane fields on the left. Then the entire British force was across the bridge to clear Tatya Tope's troops from the town. It was no easy matter to drive them out of the town for they offered resistance from the barricaded houses. After offering stout resistance Tatya Tope's troops escaped from the town.

Although Tatyā Tope was defeated yet his skill in selecting a strong defensive position and the obstinacy with which his troops fought and the guns were served established his reputation as a great general. Havelock paid a well deserved tribute to Tatyā Tope's troops. "I must do the mutineers," he wrote in his Despatch, "the justice to pronounce that they fought obstinately; otherwise they could not for a whole hour have held their own, even with much advantages of ground, against my powerful artillery fire."\* High praise indeed! Such was the profound impression created on Havelock by the gallant stand of Tatyā Tope's troops that when he received intelligence from his spies that a part of the nationalist force had fled towards Fatehgarh and the rest to Sheorajpur, about twelve miles from Cawnpore, he decided to return at once to Cawnpore (although his troops were utterly exhausted) lest Tatyā Tope should attack and plunder the town in his absence.

### *Operations in Western Bihar*

Havelock's failure to push on to the relief of the Lucknow Residency was due to two important factors—the threat to his base at Cawnpore by Tatyā Tope's 4,000 troops at Bithur and the threat to his line of communication by the revolt of the native regiments at Dinapore. Dinapore, situated at a distance of twelve miles from Patna (the capital of Western Bihar) was garrisoned by three native regiments, the 7th, 8th and 40th Bengal Native Infantry, one company of European and one of native artillery, and the 10th Foot. On July 25 the sepoys rose in revolt and marched towards Arrah to rally under the banner of Kunwar Singh, an influential zemindar of nationalist leanings. Though eighty years old Kunwar Singh proved a bold and resolute soldier and a capable leader. The 12th Bengal Irregular Cavalry also rose at Segowlie and dis-

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\* From Brigadier-General H. Havelock to the Deputy Adjutant General of the Army, — 17 August, 1857

persed throughout the country. The nationalist troops were now in a position to give serious trouble to the British authorities on both banks of the Ganges, and threaten to cut off the British line of communication between Calcutta and Cawnpore. The nationalist troops, reinforced by Kunwar Singh's levies, besieged a party of European civilians and fifty Sikhs, who had taken refuge in a fortified house at Arrah. A relief force consisting of 300 Europeans and 70 Sikhs, which was sent out from Dinapore to Arrah, was ambushed by the nationalist troops and forced to return after suffering heavy casualties. Then on July 30 Major Vincent Eyre at the head of a force consisting of 154 men of the 5th Fusiliers, three guns (two 9-pounder guns and one 24-pounder howitzer) and 18 mounted Volunteers advanced from Baksar, a station a few miles from Dinapore, for the relief of Arrah. Kunwar Singh's troops took up position in a wood about five miles from Arrah to check the advance of the British force. By a well-directed attack Eyre, however, forced Kunwar Singh to abandon his strong position. Kunwar Singh's troops fell back on another strong position about a mile in the rear. Eyre realised that to make a frontal attack on the strong position would cause heavy casualties. Under cover of the fire of his three guns, he decided to make a flanking movement towards the railway embankment. Kunwar Singh however adopted admirable tactics; he despatched a small force to take up position at the railway embankment and at the same time sent a strong detachment to harass the rear of the British force. The nationalist troops sheltered in a wood, which flanked the embankment, poured a withering musketry fire on the advancing British force, making Eyre's position extremely critical. Eyre's guns failed to make any impression but his infantry charged into the wood and after a desperate struggle cleared it of Kunwar Singh's troops. The latter fled to Jagdishpur, Kunwar Singh's stronghold. Eyre however attacked and captured Jagdishpur. Kunwar Singh's troops fled to Banda, where they were welcomed by the Nawab, one of the na-

tionalist leaders. In spite of defeat of Kunwar Singh's troops, Western Bihar continued to be a nationalist stronghold and carried on the struggle until a very late period of the following year.

### *The Crisis*

About the middle of August the situation did not appear to be very favourable for the nationalist cause. Although Havelock's force had been checked by the nationalist troops of Oudh, fresh British reinforcements were expected at Cawnpore to enable Havelock to march at the head of a large force for the relief of the Lucknow Residency. Thus a serious danger threatened the nationalist force in Lucknow. Similarly a very serious danger threatened the nationalist troops at Delhi, for on August 14 Brigadier Nicholson arrived at the Ridge with the Punjab Movable Column, which increased the effective strength of the British to 8,000 rank and file of all arms. A siege-train with large supplies of ammunition was on its way from Ferozepore and with its arrival the British force would be enabled to take up the offensive instead of remaining on the defensive as it had done so far. Thus a crisis was developing—both Delhi and Lucknow were threatened with a serious danger. Frantic efforts were made by the nationalist leaders to rush reinforcements to Delhi. Effective reinforcements could possibly come only from one source—the Gwalior Contingent and the 10,000 troops of Maharaja Sindhia. It was to secure this effective aid that Tatyá Tope bent all his energies.

### *Efforts to Meet the Crisis*

After his defeat at Bithur on August 16 Tatyá Tope transferred his activities to the territories of Maharaja Sindhia. He never lost sight of the chief objective — the recapture of Cawnpore with a view to disrupting the enemy's line of communication. This aim could be realised only if he could build up a strong force. He bent all his energies in



winning over to his side the redoubtable Gwalior Contingent and Sindhia's 10,000 troops. The Maharaja however remained steadfast in his loyalty to the British Government. That was indeed unfortunate for it seriously imperilled the nationalist cause. He played a dexterous game; he kept the Gwalior Contingent in good humour by liberal allowances and fair promises of active support for the nationalist cause. His sincerity was however soon put to the test. On July 31 there arrived at Gwalior a large nationalist force from Indore and Mhow. It comprised the sepoy of the regiments, which had mutinied at these stations. Their ranks were swelled by 600 men of Holkar's army and the 5th Infantry Regiment of the Gwalior Contingent which had mutinied at Agar (a large town in the dominions of Maharaja Sindhia, about 36 miles from Ujjain). There were also 1,000 seasoned troops led by Prince Feroze Shah. The artillery consisted of seven guns. The arrival of such a large force at Gwalior naturally created a tense situation for the Contingent and Sindhia's troops were carried away by the nationalist impulse and demanded that the Maharaja should lead them to the help of their brethren in Delhi. Sindhia played a subtle game—he said that the nationalist force from Indore and Mhow should proceed to Delhi while he would lead his troops and follow them after the rainy season. He took a firm stand on one principle—namely, that his troops should trust him to follow a sound strategic policy *i.e.* to conduct operations only after the rainy season. On September 7 the nationalist force from Indore and Mhow and some of his own troops who could not be restrained crossed the Chambal. Lest they might return and create further trouble in his dominions, Sindhia secretly removed all the boats from both banks of the river. This treachery infuriated the Contingent and now events moved to a crisis. A new leader had arrived to infuse new hope and courage in the sepoy of the Contingent. This was none other than Tatya Tope, the emissary of the Nana. After his repulse at Bithur he had repaired to Jalaun, from

where he had been watching the course of events in Sindhia's dominions. When the tension mounted with the arrival of the strong nationalist force from Indore on the way to Delhi, Tatya Tope seized the opportunity of establishing contacts with the leaders of the Contingent. It was not difficult for him to win them over to his side but it remained to be seen whether he would also succeed in seducing Sindhia's troops. The trial of strength took place on September 7 and 8. On September 7, the Contingent made a last and final effort to bring over Sindhia to their side. They appealed to him to lead them to Delhi. Sindhia replied firmly that he was opposed to any advance on Delhi until after the monsoon. This unequivocal and firm declaration of policy provoked the Contingent so much that they prepared their batteries in their camp to coerce Sindhia into submission. The 8th of September proved to be a turning point in the history of the nationalist struggle in India for on that day the main issue was to be decided whether Gwalior was to become a nationalist stronghold or not. The Maharaja was racked with anxiety for he was not sure even of the loyalty of his Maratha troops. In the morning on September 8 he paraded his force and made a stirring appeal to his Maratha troops to prevent the Hindustani sepoys of the Contingent from coercing their sovereign. The appeal went home and assured of the loyalty of his Maratha troops, he made preparations for the conflict with the Contingent. But the latter were discouraged and withdrew their guns. Tatya Tope had not been able to get sufficient time to work up the feelings of the Maratha troops and therefore he only partially succeeded in his mission, for though he won over the Gwalior Contingent to his side he failed in his chief object of making Gwalior a strong nationalist stronghold.

### *Fall of Delhi*

It was not till September 8 that the issue was decided whether Gwalior was to be a nationalist stronghold or not.

Thus much valuable time was lost and troops could not be sent to Delhi to help the nationalist force in the defence of that important city. The nationalist troops in Delhi were in fact facing a serious crisis. They knew that the siege-train from Ferozepore was on its way to Delhi. They resolved to intercept it and sent a large force for that purpose. But Nicholson too marched at the head of a well-chosen and well-equipped force and defeated them at Najafgarh on August 25 after a sanguinary struggle. The siege-train, consisting of fifty pieces of heavy ordnance arrived at the Ridge on September 7. This breaching batteries were established and on September 14 the grand assault of Delhi took place. Fifty-four pieces of heavy ordnance opened a destructive fire and having silenced the enemy guns, columns of attack were launched against the defences. The main fortifications were captured after a grim struggle; then street fighting of a most savage character took place. The nationalist troops fought with the courage of despair and from each nook and corner poured forth destructive musketry fire on the assailants. In this sanguinary struggle the British columns suffered heavy casualties to the extent of about one-third of the entire force engaged. Delhi fell after a heroic struggle on September 21. On that day the Mughal King was captured and on the next day his two sons and a grandson were seized and shot dead. So that was the tragic end of the Mughal Empire. The British flag once more waved over Delhi. The loss of Delhi was a severe blow to the nationalist cause though it did not seriously affect the effective strength of the nationalist forces for a very large number of troops escaped from Delhi and helped to swell the nationalist forces in the Doab, Oudh, Rohilkhand and Central India.

### *Reinforcements for the Lucknow Residency*

Delhi had fallen and there was a possibility that Lucknow would share the same fate. The nationalist troops had

failed to capture the Residency though the place had been invested since July 1. The garrison consisting of 927 Europeans and 765 natives had maintained the struggle, although they had been subjected to artillery and musketry fire. The attempts of the nationalist troops to effect breaches by mining had been frustrated by counter-mining. And now British forces were mustering for the relief of the Residency. By September 15 sufficient reinforcements had arrived at Cawnpore to enable Havelock to push on at the head of a large force to Lucknow. Major-General Sir James Outram, who had been appointed to the command of the united Dinapore and Cawnpore Divisions, by a rare act of self-abnegation waived his military rank, allowed Havelock to command the force, and agreed to serve as a volunteer until Lucknow should be reached. Havelock's force numbered more than three thousand men, the infantry being distributed into two brigades, of which the first was commanded by Neill and the second by Hamilton. Leaving a small force to guard Cawnpore, Havelock crossed the Ganges on September 19. After a brush with the nationalist troops at Mangalwar the force arrived on September 23 within six miles of Lucknow. Opposition now stiffened. The nationalist troops, 10,000 strong, were occupying a formidable position in and about the Alambagh. When this place was captured after a severe struggle the nationalist troops fell back on another strong position in the village of Char Bagh. The village was on the city side of the canal. The bridge over the canal was defended by a breastwork and a battery of six guns, one of them being a 24-pounder. The guns were so positioned as to sweep all the approaches to the bridge. A large number of gardens and walled enclosures provided shelter to the sharp-shooters, who poured a most destructive musketry fire on the advancing British troops. The guns were well served by the sepoy gunners and took a heavy toll of the British troops. The British guns could not cope with their superior artillery and almost every man at the British gun was killed. The position of the British force became critical. Then a few



determined British troops led by their officers dashed across the bridge only to be swept off almost to a man by a storm of grape. But their sacrifice was not in vain for the rest of the British force charged the bridge and drove the nationalist troops from their strong position. The British troops had gained an entrance into Lucknow. The city lay before them—"a vision of palaces, minars, domes azure and golden, cupolas, colonnade, long facades of fair perspective in pillar and column, terraced roofs -- all rising up amid a calm still ocean of the brightest verdure."\*

After capturing the Char Bagh bridge the British force pushed up a winding lane, which skirted the left bank of the canal. Then turning to the left they pushed through the fortified palaces and bazaars, which covered the ground extending to the very gates of the Residency. The British force overcame the determined opposition of the nationalist troops and in spite of the heavy fire poured on them through the loopholed houses, entered the Residency on September 25.

Although Havelock's force had succeeded in forcing its way into the Residency the nationalist troops had closed up behind it "like water in the wake of a diver." Havelock had succeeded in *reinforcing* the garrison but not in *relieving* it. He realised that it would not be possible for him to escort about a thousand non-combatants safely out of the Residency. Outram, who had now assumed command, was faced with a serious situation. Encumbered with the non-combatants, it was not possible to reach Cawnpore safely. At the same time it was not possible to keep the additional force in the Residency as the stocks of the provisions were reported to be depleted. After a search however it was discovered that the reserves of grain were sufficient to maintain the additional troops also for two months. Outram

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\* Russell: *My Diary in India*, p. 149

therefore resolved to stay in the Residency until further reinforcements arrived for the relief of the garrison.

### *Surprise Attack on Agra*

The nationalist forces had suffered a set-back — Delhi had fallen and the British garrison in the Lucknow Residency had been reinforced. The loss of Delhi particularly had serious consequences for it enabled the British authorities to divert a large number of troops from Delhi to Cawnpore for the relief of the Lucknow Residency. A movable column of 1,500 infantry, 900 cavalry, and 18 guns, under command of Colonel Greathed, was despatched from Delhi south-east to open up communications with Cawnpore and Lucknow. After a severe fight with the nationalist troops at Bulandshahr the column reached Agra on October 10. But a large nationalist force was also converging on Agra. A nationalist force from Indore, which had reached Gwalior at the end of July, had crossed the Chambal early in September and had concentrated at Dholpur, 34 miles from Agra. Here it was joined by some of the nationalist troops who had escaped from Delhi. Thus reinforced they increased their activities in the districts between Dholpur and the Jumna, thereby causing considerable apprehension to the British garrison in the fort of Agra. But when the British column reached Agra on October 10 the British authorities in Agra assured Greathed that the menace of his advance had sent the nationalist troops in haste across the Kari Nadi, twelve miles away. As a result of this assurance the British force did not take the necessary precautions to post pickets and to send out cavalry patrols to examine the country in the vicinity of the camp on the brigade parade-ground, a mile and a half from the fort. The result was that the nationalist troops made a surprise attack on the British camp at a time when most of the officers had gone out for breakfast in the fort. Most of the men were asleep, when first one round shot, then another came right into their midst from a battery concealed in the high crops.

At the same time half a dozen nationalist troops rode quietly up to the Quarter-Guard of the 9th Lancers, and cut down the sentry. This was followed by a general rush of the native cavalry. Meanwhile at the first sound of the firing of the guns the British officers in the fort rode hard towards the parade-ground. Soon they were engulfed in a seething mass of humanity. Thousands of the inhabitants of Agra, who had gone out to see the Feringhis who had captured Delhi, were seized with sudden panic as they heard the firing of the guns and rushed back in utter confusion along the road whence they had come. On the way they met a long string of transport animals which were carrying the baggage to the British camp. The transport animals too were seized with panic and a general stampede ensued. Then was witnessed a remarkable scene which beggars description — men, women and children running away in terror; the elephants madly screaming and trumpeting; the frightened drivers twisting the tails of the bullocks yoked to the heavy carts; and camels bubbling with their nostrils tugged at in urgency to haste. By dint of 'blows, threats and shouts' the British officers managed to force their way through the surging multitude.\* They reached the parade-ground and were soon in the thick of the fighting, which raged furiously. The British artillery also showed energy in repelling the attacks. It was however the cavalry, which by repeated charges broke up the nationalist troops, who were pursued as far as the Kari Nadi. The British pursuing column captured guns but the nationalist troops escaped without serious losses.†

### *Threat to the Line of Communication*

Delhi had fallen and the surprise attack at Agra had failed. The main struggle now centred round Lucknow. On the one hand Sir Colin Campbell, who had been appoint-

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\* J. M. Cobban: *Life and Deeds of Earl Roberts*, Vol. I, p. 177

† Lord Roberts: *Forty-one Years in India (1897)*, Vol. I, p. 74

ed the Commander-in-Chief in India in August, was taking steps to rush reinforcements to Cawnpore — the Naval Brigades from H.M.S. *Pearl* and *Shannon* were landed at Calcutta and troops were diverted from China and the Cape of Good Hope. On the other hand Tatya Tope, at the head of a large force in the area Jalaun-Kalpi, was preparing to swoop down on Cawnpore, while another nationalist force under the Nawab of Banda was preparing to cut off the line of communication between Calcutta and Cawnpore. During September the three native infantry regiments from Dinapore, the 5th Bengal Irregular Cavalry, and Kunwar Singh's levies had arrived at Banda, where they had been welcomed by the Nawab, one of the nationalist leaders. They made an attempt, though not very vigorous, to threaten the British line of communication. At the end of October, the 7th and 8th Bengal Native Infantry and other nationalist troops crossed the Jumna and pushed on to Fatehpur. On November 1 a small force of 500 men commanded by Lt.-Col. T. S. Powell, 53rd Foot, supported by two 9-pounder guns advanced from Fatehpur to intercept the nationalist troops. The nationalist troops fought bravely but suffered a repulse and escaped without serious losses to Banda.

### *Tatya Tope—The Man of Destiny*

Depression was the mood of the hour — Delhi had fallen, the British garrison in the Lucknow Residency had been reinforced, the surprise attack on Agra had failed, and the attempt to cut off the British line of communication had proved abortive. British forces were concentrated at Cawnpore for the relief of the Lucknow Residency. The trial of strength was about to take place, for the nationalist troops at Lucknow, considerably reinforced by the troops who had escaped from Delhi, were also resolved to prevent the British force from capturing Lucknow. At this crisis Tatya Tope played a decisive part. At the head of a large force, consisting of the redoubtable Gwalior Contingent and



other levies, he had taken up a strategic position of great importance at Jalaun, for he was in a position to threaten the British base at Cawnpore in case the British force advanced to Lucknow. By his admirable strategy Tatya Tope in fact placed the British Commander-in-Chief on the horns of a dilemma. If the latter advanced to the relief of the Lucknow Residency, Tatya Tope would seize the opportunity to swoop down on Cawnpore. If he succeeded in seizing Cawnpore and destroying the bridge over the Ganges Sir Colin's force would be cut off. It was therefore necessary that Sir Colin should at first deal with this menace before advancing on Lucknow. On the other hand the urgency of relieving the garrison in the Lucknow Residency could also not be denied. The predicament in which Campbell found himself placed in arriving at a solution of this baffling problem is well illustrated by the two diametrically opposite views held by the British historians regarding the decision to advance to the relief of the Lucknow garrison. Colonel Malleon justifies this decision on the ground that Lucknow was the decisive point for at that place the British had their soldiers, their women and their prestige.\* On the other hand Sir John Fortescue condemns Sir Colin's decision on the ground that he left Windham in the same perilous situation as Lord Gough at the opening of the First Sikh War. The British guns were outmatched and failed to silence the enemy guns with the result that the latter had to be captured by the infantry at the point of the bayonet entailing heavy casualties.† This very divergence of views amongst the British historians regarding Campbell's decision to advance on Lucknow is an admirable tribute to the strategy of Tatya Tope. At a time of serious national crisis, when everything seemed to go wrong, Tatya Tope held the fate of India in his hands. If

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\* Kaye and Malleon: **History of the Indian Mutiny (1888)**, IV, p. 105

† J. W. Fortescue: **A History of the British Army (1930)**, XIII, p. 333

he succeeded in gaining a decisive victory by seizing Cawnpore and cutting off Sir Colin's force he would rally the whole country to his side and swing the balance in favour of the nationalist cause. The moment was critical. The whole country looked up to Tatya Tope to retrieve the worsening situation. Tatya Tope appeared to be India's man of destiny.

## Chapter VI

# SHIVA'S THUNDERBOLT

### *The Garrison of Cawnpore*

ON November 3 Sir Colin Campbell arrived at Cawnpore and on November 9 left that place to join his force in the plain beyond Bani. For the relief of the Lucknow Residency Sir Colin had at his disposal about 6,000 infantry and moderate forces of cavalry and artillery. He left about 500 Europeans and a few Sikhs under the command of Major-General Windham for the protection of Cawnpore. Before leaving Cawnpore Sir Colin issued detailed instructions to Windham for its defence *viz.*, to improve the entrenchment, which had been constructed on the river bank to guard the vital bridge-of-boats; to despatch troops arriving from Calcutta to Lucknow but to detain, if necessary, the brigade of Madras Native troops expected to arrive at Cawnpore shortly. If a threat developed from Jalaun—Kalpi, then Windham was to make a demonstration by encamping his troops conspicuously and in extended order in advance of the entrenchment taking care to guard the entrenchment with sufficient troops. Windham was however ordered not to move out to attack unless compelled to do so by force of circumstances, in order to prevent the entrenchment from being bombarded.

Not only was there an inadequate force but the defences of Cawnpore were also insignificant. The entrenchment, on the right bank of the Ganges, was an earthwork, which had been hurriedly constructed. It was limited in extent and unfinished. The entrenchment could therefore afford protection only against a weak force. Its chief merit was that it guarded a vital point — the bridge-of-boats. Other-

wise from every other point of view it was a source of weakness to the garrison. The ground round it, although flat, was encumbered with numerous houses, gardens, and walls, which could provide adequate shelter to the enemy troops to harass the garrison. Moreover, the old native city of Cawnpore, with its walled streets, was only a few hundred yards distant; consequently (if the city was not defended) an enemy force could approach even with artillery, under cover, to within easy musket range of the entrenchment. Thus it would be difficult to defend the entrenchment, although its safety was of such vital importance, if a superior enemy force attacked it vigorously. Windham took some steps to improve its defences by throwing up one or two outworks but he could not remedy its principal defects. The difficulties and the dangers of the situation were indeed obvious and Tatya Tope, who was well served by his spies, was not the man to miss this grand opportunity of cutting off the enemy's line of communication and destroying the bridge-of-boats. Tatya Tope hoped to isolate the British force engaged in the difficult operations in Lucknow. It was a bold strategic move.

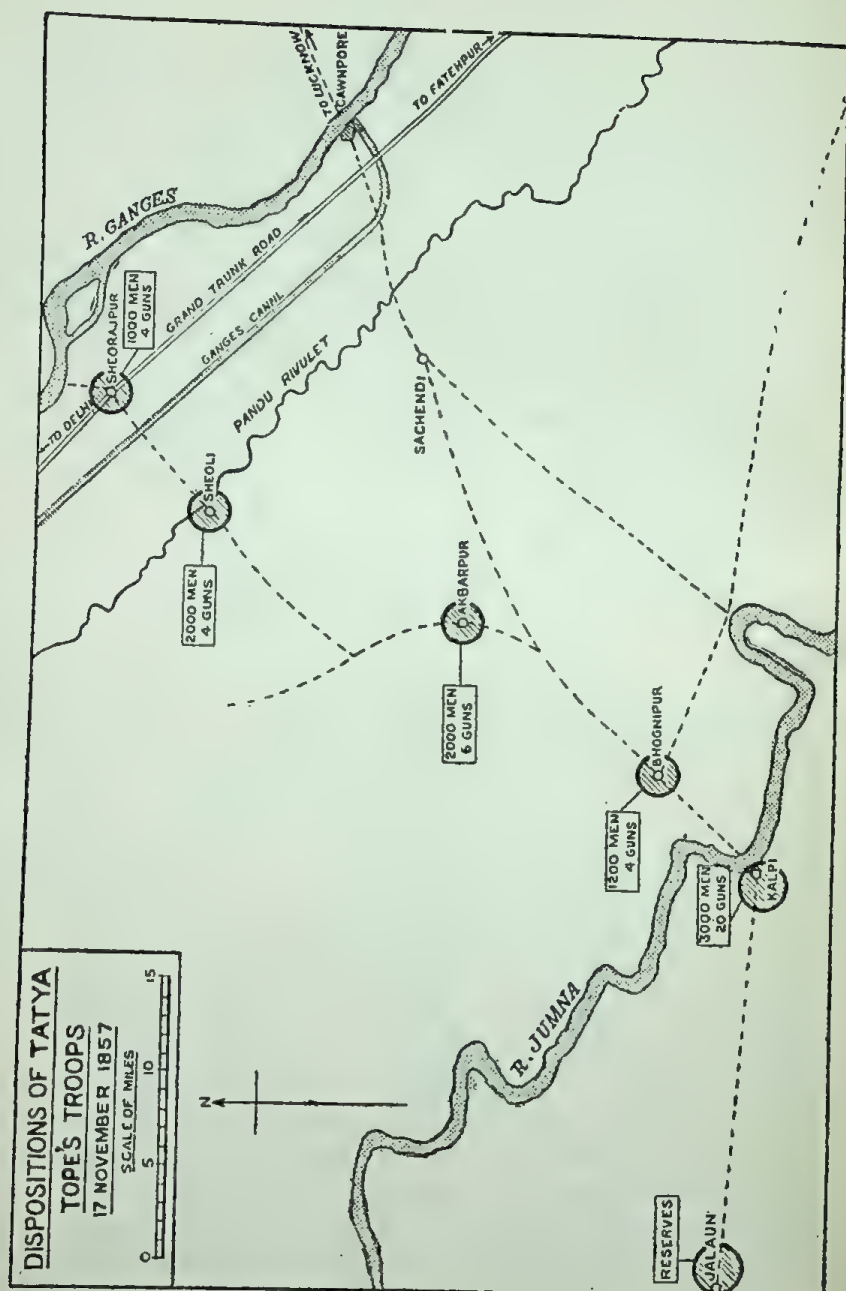
### *Shiva's Thunderbolt*

Tatya Tope held Shiva's thunderbolt in his hand and he prepared to hurl it at his enemy. Tatya Tope was well served by his spies, who kept him informed about Sir Colin's movements. On the same day that the British Commander-in-Chief left Cawnpore to join his force in the plain beyond Bani for the relief of the Lucknow Residency, Tatya Tope leaving his treasure and *impedimenta* at Jalaun, moved to Kalpi in order to advance on Cawnpore. Hopes ran high for Tatya Tope had an excellent army of 25,000 men of which the effective strength was 14,000 men and forty guns. Tatya Tope showed considerable skill in the strategic deployment of his forces. His strategy was governed by two considerations—to move forward slowly so as to give sufficient time to Sir Colin to get deep-



ly involved in the Lucknow operations, thus preventing his return to Cawnpore, and secondly to deploy his forces in such a manner as to suggest that he intended to reinforce the nationalist force in Lucknow rather than attack the weak garrison at Cawnpore. In order to understand the latter move it is necessary to bear in mind the topography of the area. Kalpi is situated on the right bank of the river Jumna, about forty-six miles south-west from Cawnpore. From Kalpi a road led to Cawnpore—passing through the two villages of Bhognipur and Sachendi and crossing a small rivulet called Pandu Nadi. Another road, branching off midway between Bhognipur and Sachendi, led *via* Akbarpur to Sheoli (near the Pandu Nadi) and Sheorajpur, on the Grand Trunk Road about three miles from Serai Ghat on the Ganges, and twenty-one miles north-west of Cawnpore. It was the latter route, which Tatya Tope followed, to mislead Windham into the belief that his aim was to effect a junction with the nationalist troops at Lucknow.

Leaving a strong force of 3,000 men and 20 guns for the protection of his base at Kalpi, Tatya Tope crossed the Jumna on November 10. The force moved slowly forward to Bhognipur, Akbarpur, Sheoli and Sheorajpur. Tatya Tope posted large number of troops to guard these four places. 1,200 men with four guns guarded Bhognipur; 2,000 men with six guns protected Akbarpur; 2,000 men with four guns were posted at Sheoli; and 1,000 men with four guns were stationed at Sheorajpur. These preliminary operations began about November 10 and were completed about November 19. Thus Tatya Tope's troops were astride the road leading from Kalpi to Sheorajpur. They were well disposed for they formed a segment of a circle as it were round Cawnpore. Tatya Tope was successful in severing Cawnpore's connection with the west and the north-west—the country on which it was mainly dependent for its supplies. Further Tatya Tope disposed his troops in such a manner as not to reveal to the enemy his plan of the operations. So successful was he in his tactics that



there was a sharp difference of opinion amongst the British officers at Cawnpore as to Tatya Tope's real intentions. There were some who held that these preparations indicated Tatya Tope's resolve to attack Cawnpore. Others were of the view that the march on the Ganges at a prudent distance from Cawnpore showed that Tatya Tope wanted to go to Oudh to threaten the rear of Sir Colin's force. Thus by his admirable tactics Tatya Tope kept the enemy on tenterhooks as to his real intentions. Tatya Tope's army was now poised for the attack on Cawnpore. He now prepared to hurl Shiva's thunderbolt at his enemy.

### *Windham's Preparations*

The approach of Tatya Tope's army alarmed Windham, who sent a message to Sir Colin to obtain his authority to detain some of the troops who were on their way to Lucknow. By November 26, when the first engagement with Tatya Tope's troops took place, Windham had succeeded in considerably augmenting his inadequate force, which now amounted to 1,700 men and ten guns. His movable force was however limited somewhat for four companies of infantry and a few artillery-men had to be left for the protection of the entrenchment. To add to the difficulties of Windham the road to Lucknow was closed and for several days after November 19 he had no information about the fate of Sir Colin's force. Meanwhile he had received information about the dispositions of Tatya Tope's troops, which had upset him considerably. He however thought that it would be possible for him to attack successfully either of Tatya Tope's two weak forward positions at Sheoli and Sheorajpur (separated by the Ganges Canal), at a distance of fifteen miles from Cawnpore, the main body of Tatya Tope's force being still in the direction of Akbarpur and Bhognipur, more than twenty-five miles off. Windham had been instructed by Sir Colin Campbell to defend the entrenchment and not to move out of it to attack the enemy. He, however, felt that circumstances strongly

demanding a modification of these instructions. He realised the advantages of seizing the initiative. His plan was to leave some troops to guard the entrenchment and with the rest of his force to beat the enemy in detail before they could concentrate. A certain amount of risk was involved in the carrying out of this plan but it was undoubtedly the true strategy for "to destroy an enemy in detail is manifestly one of the best chances for a small force against a vastly superior one."\* Windham worked out the details of the plan i.e. to transport at night approximately 1,200 men in boats by the Ganges Canal, land them at daylight at a point on the road between Sheoli and Sheorajpur, attack either of these forward positions, and return to Cawnpore after inflicting casualties on the enemy. But as this plan involved a modification of the instructions of Sir Colin, Windham forwarded it on November 17 for the approval of the Commander-in-Chief. On the same day he carried out Sir Colin's instructions to encamp the troops conspicuously in advance of the entrenchment by moving his camp beyond and to the west of the town, near the junction of the Delhi and Kalpi roads.

Windham did not receive further instructions from Sir Colin as the road to Lucknow was cut off. He therefore gave up the plan of attacking either of the two weak forward positions of Tatyá Tope. There were now only two courses open to him to follow—either to defend the entrenchment and the bridge-of-boats or to take up position with the main body of his troops outside the town, and in case of attack endeavour, if possible, to save it from pillage and destruction. The first alternative would have been preferable if the entrenchment had been a strong defensive position. Windham however very well knew the limitations of the entrenchment to serve as a good defensive position. He therefore fell back on the second alternative and after a reconnaissance of the environs of the town, he

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\* John Adye: **The Defence of Cawnpore** (London 1858), p. 9



selected a suitable site for his forward position. Outside the town and close to the walls and gardens which surrounded it, there were a number of high mounds, being old brick-kilns. They afforded certain obvious advantages for defence for they not only commanded the surrounding country but also provided shelter to the infantry and the mounting of light field-guns in commanding positions.

By his bold strategy Tatya Tope placed Windham in a very difficult position. At the approach of Tatya Tope's superior force Windham felt that it would be folly to remain inactive. If Tatya Tope was allowed to develop the attack in full force Windham's small force would be inevitably routed. He therefore resolved to strike the first blow. He was of the view that the entrenchment and the vital bridge-of-boats would be "better defended by holding the town and its outskirts than in any other way." He wanted to use the town as a cover to the entrenchment. Thus in view of the changed circumstances he ignored Sir Colin's positive instructions not "to move out to attack unless compelled to do so by force of circumstances, in order to save the intrenchment from being bombarded." By ignoring these positive instructions, Windham played into the hands of Tatya Tope, who wanted to draw out the British force from the defensive position and annihilate it by his superior force, for Nelson's dictum, that numbers alone can annihilate is as true of the land as of the sea. The issue of the battle was never in doubt and Tatya Tope would have certainly captured Cawnpore and the vital bridge-of-boats, had not Sir Colin's force, by an unfortunate coincidence, returned from Lucknow just in time to snatch the victory from his grasp.

### *Attack on the Advance Guard*

Windham was not only worried about Tatya Tope's superior force but he was also deeply concerned with the road to Lucknow having been cut off. It was of vital importance to maintain the link with Sir Colin's force at

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Lucknow. On November 22 he received information that the armed native police, which was guarding the bridge of Bani, about thirty miles from Cawnpore on the Lucknow road, had been surprised and defeated by the nationalist troops. Windham realised the gravity of the situation and decided to take the risk of weakening his small force in order to recapture the important post guarding the Bani bridge. Accordingly he sent a wing of the 27th Madras Native Infantry with two 9-pounder guns to re-occupy this post and thus to keep open the line of communication with Lucknow. Meanwhile the threat from Tatyá Tope's force daily became more imminent. On November 24 the reports from his spies convinced Windham that Tatyá Tope's intention was to capture Cawnpore and not to advance into Oudh. Accordingly he left four companies of the 64th and a small force of artillery to guard the entrenchment while he advanced his camp from the site of the junction of the Delhi and Kalpi roads to near the bridge by which the Kalpi road crossed the canal. It was a rash move to engage a superior force in battle but probably he thought that the canal would serve as a wide wet ditch along his whole front and he would keep a vigilant eye on the movements of the enemy on his flank and patrol all the roads incessantly, in case they should try to get round his rear. Windham's whole conception of the campaign was vitiated by the fond belief that he would be able to attack Tatyá Tope's force in unconnected bodies. But Tatyá Tope was a gifted commander and no mean master of strategy. When he was informed by his spies that Windham had taken up position near the bridge by which the Kalpi road crossed the canal he pushed forward his force towards Cawnpore. On November 25 the main body advanced from Akbarpur to Sachendi while the advance guard took up position on the Pandu Nadi, only three miles from Windham's camp.

Windham's plan was to attack the advance guard and after inflicting casualties to return to the camp, remain on the defensive and cover the entrenchment. Accordingly he

pushed forward his force to attack Tatya's advance guard at the Pandu Nadi. His force of two brigades consisted of about 1,200 men and eight guns. The first brigade, composed of the 88th, four companies of the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade, and four 6-pounder guns, was under the command of Brigadier Carthew. The second brigade, consisting of the 34th Regiment, four companies of the 82nd, and four 9-pounder guns was placed under the command of Colonel Kelly of the 34th. Windham had also at his disposal a hundred native troopers and ten men of the 9th Lancers. A strong detachment was left to guard the canal bridge and guards were also posted to protect the baggage.

Tatya Tope's advance guard consisting of 2,500 infantry, 500 cavalry and six guns of large calibre was strongly posted on the other side of the Pandu Nadi. The almost dry bed of the Nadi however presented no obstacle to the advance of the British force. Accordingly Windham formed a plan of attack to exploit this advantage. Four companies of the Rifle Brigade were to advance in skirmishing order on the right of the road, their extreme right flank being covered by the Sowars. Behind them were to follow the 88th and the four light guns. On the left of the road the 34th Regiment was to advance with one wing in skirmishing order and the other in support with the four 9-pounder guns. The 82nd Regiment was to be held in reserve in column.

As the British troops approached the Pandu Nadi, Tatya Tope's troops opened a heavy fire from siege and field-guns. A swarm of Tatya Tope's horsemen came galloping hard and charged into the extreme left of the 34th Regiment but they were greeted by a volley and retired in confusion. The British line continued to advance in face of extremely heavy fire. Tatya Tope's troops held their ground for some time, and poured in several rounds of grape as the British troops approached them. The latter however advanced with a rush, rapidly crossed the bed of the river and captured the position. Tatya Tope's troops retired to rejoin the

main body, which was not far off in the rear. They left behind two 8-inch howitzers, one 6-pounder gun, and some ammunition wagons. The British troops pursued them for some distance and cleared a small village only to discover that Tatyá Tope's main force was not far off. The clouds of dust betrayed the movement of Tatyá Tope's troops. Thinking discretion to be the better part of valour Windham beat a hasty retreat to the site near the bridge, where he had encamped previously. This retrograde movement encouraged Tatyá Tope to unleash his cavalry, which boldly pursued the British force until Windham halted and deployed his troops. Then they retired for it was no part of their game to engage seriously the British troops at that time. The total casualties suffered by the British force in this action were 92. Windham was however considerably heartened by the prospects of speedy reinforcement for on his return to the camp he received a note from Lucknow that Sir Colin's force would be leaving for Cawnpore on the next day.

### *Tatyá Tope's Plan*

Tatyá Tope, well served by his spies as he was, had also received information that Sir Colin would be returning to Cawnpore with his force. He therefore realised the imperative necessity of attacking and annihilating Windham's small force before he received fresh reinforcements. It was a race against time. Hopes and fears alternated for who could say whether the task of capturing Cawnpore and the bridge-of-boats would be accomplished before the British force returned from Lucknow. Tatyá Tope took energetic steps to speed up the attack. He certainly displayed considerable energy in the prosecution of this campaign. Such a golden opportunity to win a resounding victory he could not afford to let slip. With his overwhelming superior force he hoped to clinch the issue. He therefore decided to launch an attack on the British position without delay. He ordered his advance



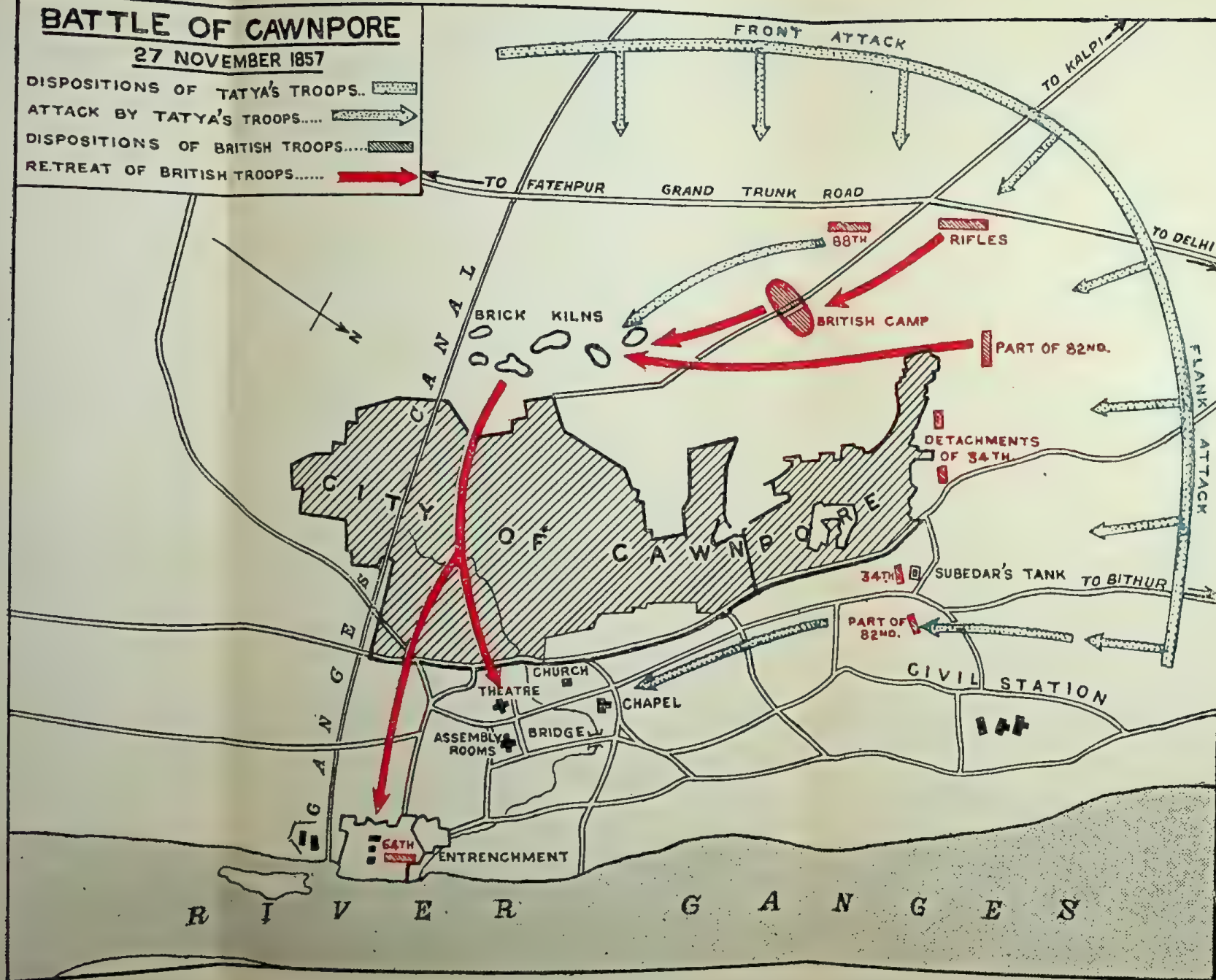


# TATYA TOPE

## BATTLE OF CAWNPORE

27 NOVEMBER 1857

- DISPOSITIONS OF TATYA'S TROOPS.....
- ATTACK BY TATYA'S TROOPS.....
- DISPOSITIONS OF BRITISH TROOPS.....
- RETREAT OF BRITISH TROOPS.....



guard to be ready to move forward at break of day and to halt at some distance from the British camp to enable the detachments at Sheoli and Sheorajpur to march at night so as to take up favourable positions for opening fire on the right flank of the British force. Then both the columns were to launch an attack simultaneously.

### *Deployment of the British Force*

Meanwhile Windham had not been sitting idle but had taken certain precautions to meet the expected attack. The position was critical. Windham felt that with an inadequate force it would not be possible for him to protect the town. Further he was apprehensive lest his right flank, which was rather open to attack, be turned. He therefore deployed his force so as to meet the double threat developing from the Kalpi and Bithur roads respectively. Brigadier Carthew's force comprising the 34th, two companies of the 82nd, supported by four 6-pounder guns guarded the right flank and watched the Bithur road. The guns were in the centre protected by two companies of the 82nd (less 50 men). The 34th on the left took up position in the gardens. Fifty men of the 82nd on the right were posted in some ruined huts. Another force (under the command of Col. Walpole of the Rifle Brigade) consisted of four companies of the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade, the 88th Regiment, two 9-pounder guns and two 24-pounder howitzers and two 24-pounder guns manned by seamen of the *Shannon*. The guns were in the centre, supported by the Rifle Brigade and the 88th on either flank. Mid-way, in a wood between these two forward positions, was posted the main body of the 82nd.

### *Rout of the British Force*

Tatya Tope launched a vigorous attack on the British position at 10 A.M. on 27 November. His troops were deployed in a semi-circle around the British position. He wisely held back his infantry and commenced the attack

with an overwhelming force of heavy artillery. He launched the attacks simultaneously on Windham's front and the right flank. He kept up the pressure and exploited the success whenever either of these fronts gave way. This policy was entirely successful. As Tatya Tope's attack gained in momentum Windham, growing nervous about his right flank, galloped off to that front to find out how Brigadier Carthew was faring. He found that the situation was in hand. Tatya Tope's guns had opened fire but the reply from the British 6-pounders and Enfield rifles was effective. In spite of the steady and continuous artillery and musketry fire Carthew held his ground. Thus assured about the stability of his right flank, Windham (after an hour's stay) galloped hard to find out how his main front was maintaining the struggle against heavy odds. Here to his surprise and consternation he found that Tatya Tope had increased the pressure so much as to make considerable headway. When the British 24-pounder guns were pushed to the front to silence Tatya Tope's guns, one of the latter planted on the road, made an effective reply. At the same time Tatya Tope's batteries in front and on the right flank of Windham's position opened fire with grape and canister. The fire from Tatya Tope's numerous guns increased in volume and intensity and inflicted heavy casualties. The British guns were clearly outmatched. It was the flanking fire particularly which worked havoc in the British ranks. Windham tried to subdue this fire with the help of one of the 24-pounders operated by men of the *Shannon*. But all in vain. Tatya Tope's guns were superior in numbers and in calibre. The battle raged for several hours and at last the British front began to give way. The situation was indeed critical for the ammunition ran short and the bullock drivers began to desert in large numbers. There was no other alternative except to fall back on another position in the rear near the brick-kilns. Accordingly Windham ordered this retrograde movement. Further in order to protect his retiring movement, he ordered the 34th on the right flank to re-



inforce him. As the right flank was thus weakened he ordered Carthew to fall back on the brick-kilns. Moved by an overpowering anxiety to protect his retiring movement he deliberately withdrew his force from the right flank, thus opening a way for Tatya Tope's troops for an attack on the town and the entrenchment. When Tatya Tope found that the British main front had cracked and their right flank was also exposed he unleashed his infantry and cavalry. The utmost confusion prevailed in the British ranks. When the 34th came from the right flank to succour the British force, which was falling back on the brick-kilns, they found that the retreat, under the pressure of Tatya Tope's infantry was becoming almost a rout. Their presence helped to restore some confidence amongst the British troops, and they helped in recovering the two heavy guns, which had been abandoned. It was 5 o'clock when the British force, reinforced by the 34th, fell back in confusion and disorder on the brick-kilns. Thinking that it would be possible to make a stand on this defensive position, Windham left Major-General Dupuis, R.A. in command of this force and galloped off to the right flank to find out how Brigadier Carthew's force, weakened by the withdrawal of the 34th, was maintaining the unequal struggle. Carthew did hold his ground for some time but as the pressure increased he fell back on the defensive position near the brick-kilns, according to the instructions received from Windham. Windham therefore found that the right flank being completely unprotected, Tatya Tope's troops had occupied the lower part of the city and were attacking even the entrenchment. This was a dangerous situation. But at that critical moment, when the British fortunes were at the lowest ebb, help came from an unexpected quarter. A detachment of the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade arrived by forced marches from Fatehpur just in time to save the situation from taking an ugly turn. Windham now realised that the time had come to fall back on the entrenchment. So he ordered Major-General Dupuis to the entrenchment while with the help of the fresh rein-

forcements he pushed back Tatya Tope's troops from the lower part of the town. Realising the necessity of keeping Tatya Tope's troops as far away as possible from the entrenchment he ordered Carthew, with a small force of two companies of the 88th and four 6-pounder guns, to take up position at the Theatre, about a quarter of a mile south of the entrenchment. Carthew carried out this task successfully. He encountered a number of skirmishers and pushed them back on the Bithur road. Then he fell back on the Theatre. The outpost at the Theatre was of vital importance since it prevented Tatya Tope's troops from launching an attack on the entrenchment. Further it covered the Assembly rooms, which contained valuable stores and clothing for the troops.

Meanwhile the pressure maintained by Tatya Tope's troops on the British force at the brick-kilns had increased considerably with the result that the retreat to the entrenchment turned into a rout. Confusion reigned supreme and the British troops were completely demoralised. The result of this panic and disorderly retreat was that large stores of camp equipage, saddlery, and harnesses were abandoned.

By driving the British force into the entrenchment Tatya Tope established his reputation as a great general. By sheer weight of numbers he bore down upon the British position and compelled Windham to beat a hasty retreat. Tactical mistakes were undoubtedly made by Windham. Still when every consideration is given due weight the conclusion is irresistible that Windham was completely outmanoeuvred by his formidable rival.

### *Attack on the Entrenchment*

Tatya Tope had gained an overwhelming advantage by driving back the British force into the entrenchment. The task of capturing the defensive position remained and to that task he bent all his energies. Windham too knew that

the fate of the garrison hung by a narrow thread and he therefore took energetic steps to stem the advance. Anticipating a double thrust towards the entrenchment he deployed his forces in a manner so as to meet this threat. Accordingly he posted a strong force under Col. Walpole for the protection of the advanced portion of the town to the left of the canal. This force consisted of five companies of the Rifle Brigade and two companies of the 82nd and was supported by four guns (two 9-pounders and two 24-pounder howitzers). In the rear Windham took up position with a small force consisting of the 88th, with the double object of acting as a support to the forward position, and of defending the portion of the town nearest the Ganges on the left of the canal. Brigadier H. Wilson, with the 64th, guarded the entrenchment, with a forward picket established at the Baptist Chapel on the extreme right. Brigadier Carthew with a small force comprising the 34th Regiment, the flank companies of the 82nd, and four guns, was given the important task of holding the Bithur road in advance of the Baptist Chapel. He could be supported by the strong picket at the Baptist Chapel, if necessary. Having made these arrangements for the defence of the entrenchment and the bridge-of-boats, Windham awaited with fear and trepidation Tatya Tope's attack in force.

Tatya was aware of the fact that it was a race against time for Sir Colin was hurrying back from Lucknow to the help of Windham. He held the trump card in his hand — by sheer weight of numbers he hoped to annihilate the British garrison. But the operations could be concluded successfully only if he took time by the forelock and launched a vigorous attack on the British positions before reinforcements arrived to turn the tables. Accordingly he ordered that vigorous attacks should be made on both sides of the city in the morning on November 28. Tatya Tope's plan was to make a double thrust towards the entrench-

ment; but while keeping up pressure on Walpole's brigade, he intended to throw the whole weight of his force on to the Bithur road, for that was a very vital sector, whose possession would enable him to bombard not only the entrenchment but also the bridge-of-boats. Tatya Tope's admirable plan was successfully carried out.

Tatya Tope's troops attacked Walpole's force with considerable gusto and a well contested fight took place, but the advantage lay with the British for not only was the attack held but two 18-pounder guns were also captured. But this engagement very well served Tatya Tope's purpose since it kept immobile not only Walpole's force but also the small force in the rear commanded by Windham in person. Tatya Tope's main attack developed from the direction of the Bithur road and the brunt of the attack was borne by Carthew's force. Carthew had at day-break pushed forward his force beyond the bridge, where he had bivouacked on the previous evening in order to take up position at the Racket Court some little distance beyond the bridge. He however received fresh instructions from Windham to fall back on the bridge. Accordingly he took up position in defence of the bridge. He placed two companies to cover his left and one company to cover his right. Three companies occupied the ruined house in the front and on the flanks of the bridge. The remainder of the force was posted at the bridge.

Tatya Tope began the attack with a heavy cannonade on Carthew's force. The British troops plied the muskets with considerable effect but the small guns were easily out-matched by Tatya Tope's 18-pounder guns. The artillery duel lasted for more than two hours, from half-past 9 o'clock till noon. Tatya's gunners poured in shot and shell and inflicted heavy casualties. Tatya Tope's troops too suffered from the British fire. After this artillery duel Carthew, on instructions from Windham, pushed on to attack and capture the troublesome guns, while at the same time Wilson at the head of the 64th pushed on from the



entrenchment in parallel lines to capture the guns on his front. Carthew's force advanced on the road, which after crossing the bridge ran through a line of huts into a wide plain traversed by a watercourse. As the British troops advanced across the plain to attack and capture the three guns at the other end, they were met by a shower of grape. The British troops reached almost within a hundred yards of the guns. Tatya Tope realised that the time had come to mow down the small British force. The guns swept the road, while the infantry from broken ground and huts, plied their muskets with considerable effect. To escape the storm of grape and musketry, which burst upon them in all its fury, the British troops lay down in the watercourse, waiting for the arrival of the British guns. The two guns (the other two having been left to defend the Allahabad road) came up shortly afterwards, unlimbered, opened up a smart cannonade and silenced Tatya Tope's guns. The latter were withdrawn to the rear. Unsupported by cavalry as he was, Carthew did not think it advisable to push forward. He fell back on the bridge.

While this fierce engagement had been taking place forward of the bridge, Wilson had issued from the entrenchment at the head of the 64th (reinforced by forty men of a company of the 82nd till then under Carthew's orders) to engage Tatya Tope's troops. The British force made its way through a ravine, which was commanded by high ground in front as well as on the right and left. Tatya Tope's troops posted on the high ground had the advantage of the terrain and well did they exploit it. Six guns played upon the advancing force. The British troops suffered heavy casualties not only from the artillery but also from the murderous fire of the musketry. Nevertheless the British skirmishers in advance of the main body reached within a hundred yards of the guns and made a wild rush to capture them. But Tatya Tope's troops were well prepared for that. The cavalry and an overwhelming force of infantry broke up the wild charge and cut to pieces the

majority of the skirmishers, including Brigadier Wilson. The main body, being too far behind, had not been able to support the wild charge of the skirmishers. They however came up just in time to cover the retreat of the few survivors. This disaster imperilled Carthew's force since his right flank was now left unprotected. But realising the vital importance of maintaining his position to prevent Tatya Tope's troops from pushing on to the entrenchment Carthew maintained the struggle against tremendous odds. Tatya Tope's troops, encouraged by the repulse of Wilson's force now concentrated their efforts on annihilating Carthew's force. They occupied in large numbers all the commanding positions, the houses, garden walls and the Church on Carthew's left. Carthew sent a company of British troops to clear the Church and its environs but not much success attended this operation. Carthew therefore concentrated his small force on both flanks of the bridge and with his two guns kept up a heavy fire. He well realised the vital importance of holding this bridge because with its loss Tatya Tope's troops would sweep onward like an irresistible tide to engulf the small garrison in the entrenchment. Tatya Tope too realised that the supreme moment had arrived for gaining a decisive victory. About 6 o'clock he ordered a vigorous attack to be made on the bridge. 5,000 of his best troops rushed to the attack, subjecting the British force to a hailstorm of bullets. The British force suffered many casualties. To add still further to their troubles Tatya Tope's gunners succeeded in planting a gun in the churchyard so as to enfilade the bridge at a distance of approximately 150 yards. Carthew now realised that the game was up and that it was impossible to hold an untenable position. He therefore retired into the entrenchment, the retreat being covered by two companies of the Rifle Brigade, which had just come up to his support. It was quite dark when his force reached the entrenchment. It was a signal triumph for Tatya Tope to have compelled Wilson's as well as Carthew's troops to seek refuge in the entrenchment. With a wild yell of

triumph Tatya Tope's troops rushed towards the entrenchment. They now commanded the riverside. They seized and burnt the Assembly rooms, which had been converted into a great store-house containing the whole of the baggage and camp equipage of Havelock's force, which had been left there when he had crossed the Ganges into Oudh.

### *Tatya Tope's Triumph*

The events of November 28 proved conclusively that Tatya Tope was a shrewd tactician as well as a great strategist. By his strategic move he had almost succeeded in securing Cawnpore and by his skilful tactics he had driven the British force into the entrenchment. As night enveloped the city of Cawnpore, Tatya Tope sat exultant in his camp dreaming of a decisive victory leading to the re-establishment of the Nana's undisputed authority over Cawnpore. Fate however had willed otherwise for victory was to be snatched from his grasp by an unexpected turn of events. Sir Colin Campbell returned with his force from Lucknow just in time to save the exhausted garrison and to rout Tatya Tope's forces. In order to appreciate the predicament in which Tatya Tope found himself placed it is necessary to understand how Sir Colin accomplished the tremendous task of relieving Lucknow and at the same time hurrying back to Cawnpore in time to save the garrison.

## Chapter VII

# THE TURN OF THE TIDE

### *A Holocaust*

SIR COLIN CAMPBELL, escorted by a detachment of cavalry and horse artillery, left Cawnpore on November 9 and after a forced march of 35 miles reached the camp at Buntera. On November 12 his force advanced to Alambagh and arrived there on November 13 after brushing aside slight opposition. The stores and camp equipage were left at Alambagh under a strong guard while the force advanced to the relief of the Lucknow Residency. The total force available was 4,700 men fit for service. Hope Grant was in executive command of this force, which comprised three infantry brigades, commanded by Adrian Hope, Greathed and Russell respectively and a cavalry brigade commanded by Little. The Artillery brigade (commanded by Crawford) and the Naval Brigade (commanded by Peel) had 49 ordnance pieces — 12 heavy guns, 10 mortars and 27 light field-guns. There was also a small brigade of Engineers. Sir Colin wanted to avoid the route taken by Havelock across the Char Bagh bridge; he did not want to thread his way through the densest part of the city, so strongly defended by batteries and barricades. Advance along this route would have entailed heavy losses. His plan was to march round the city by the east i.e. to advance from the Alambagh to the north-east and occupy the Dilkusha palace; push on to the north to secure the Martiniere; cross the canal by the bridge nearest to the Gumti; and covering his right flank with the river, to advance on the Sikandra Bagh. The plan was implemented successfully. The Dilkusha palace and the Martiniere were secured on November 14,



after negligible resistance. Leaving a small force to guard the bases — the Dilkusha and the Martiniere — the main body advanced northward on November 16, forded the canal unopposed and pushed on towards Sikandra Bagh. The nationalist troops defending Lucknow followed skilful tactics. They allowed the advance guard to pass through a village and enter a defile (which led to the north-eastern corner of the Sikandra Bagh) and then suddenly opened fire on them from the front and both the flanks. The advance guard consisting of a strong body of cavalry, Blunt's troop of Bengal Horse Artillery, and a company of the 53rd was caught almost in a trap. There was great confusion for the cavalry, unable to manoeuvre in the defile, turned back only to find the way choked by the infantry and artillery in rear. After much difficulty the cavalry was withdrawn. Then the infantry cleared the banks on both sides. They were helped in this task by Blunt's troop of artillery. Then the British column advanced to attack the Sikandra Bagh, which was strongly fortified and held in strength by the nationalist troops. It was indeed a strong defensive position — a high-walled enclosure of strong masonry, 120 yards square, carefully loopholed all round, flanked at the corners by circular bastions, and containing inside a number of houses from which fire could be kept up on the assailants. Sir Colin decided to breach the wall at the south-eastern angle. The attack was launched on November 16. The nationalist troops kept up a heavy musketry fire. But a heavy gun opened fire at a range of eighty yards and made a breach through which poured an endless stream of the assailants. 2,000 nationalist troops died fighting almost to a man in defence of this vital post. The terrible conflict raged for hours. The scene of the battle-field resembled Dante's 'Inferno'. "The darkness of night had set in; but all was as light as day: the whole Panorama was in a blaze. Shot and shell were flying about in all directions; the rattle of musketry never ceased; while the Highland yell and responsive British cheer, as the columns cleared the contested position, told

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that they had carried all before them."\* At the close of the grim struggle 2,000 nationalist troops lay dead in heaps about the garden.

### *Fickleness of Fortune in War*

The next objective was a large mosque called the Shah Najaf, which barred the road to the Residency. Here the nationalist troops offered equally strong resistance. The mosque, surrounded by high loopholed walls, was well fortified and held in strength. The nationalist troops successfully resisted all the attempts of the British force to capture this building. The mortars and Peel's heavy guns being placed in battery, opened fire but it proved to be ineffective, for the nationalist troops poured a hailstorm of grape and musketry from the mosque while their guns from the Kaiser Bagh and Mess House worked havoc in the British ranks. The nationalist troops defended the mosque with grim determination. For three hours the British guns bombarded the mosque without making an impression on its solid walls. The British troops on the other hand suffered heavy casualties from an incessant musketry fire. Sir Colin faced a difficult situation for to remain there would mean still heavier casualties but it was also out of question to retreat by the narrow defile blocked with troops. He decided to have recourse to the bayonet; so he ordered the 93rd to lead the assault. Middleton's light field battery passing under a withering fire from the Mess House unlimbered and opened with grape in close proximity to the building. The 93rd led by Sir Colin approached the Shah Najaf, but halted at its foot. They could not force an entry into the building for the high walls were intact and there were no means of escalding. Under cover of musketry fire two of Peel's guns were dragged up and opened within a few yards of the solid stone walls. But the guns failed to breach the

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\* G. Bouchier: **Eight Months' Campaign against the Bengal Sepoy Army (1858)**, p. 144

wall. Meanwhile the nationalist troops subjected the assailants to sharp musketry fire. The advantage clearly lay with them. Peel's guns failed to make any impression on the solid walls; at the same time the British casualties were mounting from the sharp and well-directed fire. There was no other alternative except to retire. Accordingly Sir Colin gave the order to retire. To cover the removal of Peel's guns, the rocket tubes were brought up, and discharged their contents into the building. This seemed to have demoralised the nationalist troops, and dreading the fate which had overtaken their brethren in Sinkandra Bagh, they were seized with sudden panic and evacuated the building at a time when the British force was preparing to retire. Thus at a critical moment by an unexpected turn of events Sir Colin gained a victory—a typical example of the fickleness of fortune in war.\*

### *Relief of the Residency*

The next objective was the Mess-House, a large stone building, fortified with a ditch and escarped with masonry. On November 17 the heavy guns were directed against the Mess-House, which after five hours' bombardment, was taken by Hope's brigade. Then the 90th forced open the gate of the Moti Mahal and captured it after stiff resistance. Meanwhile the garrison took possession of some buildings which intervened between the Residency and the Moti Mahal and effected a junction with Sir Colin's force.

The first part of Sir Colin's task was done. There remained the difficult task of withdrawing the garrison with its encumbrance of some fifteen hundred women, children, sick and wounded. Sir Colin was firm in his decision to withdraw to Cawnpore, leaving a strong force under the command of Outram to keep in check the nationalist troops

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\* L. Shadwell: *Life of Lord Clyde* (1881), Vol. I, p. 14

in Lucknow. This course he adopted in opposition to the advice of Havelock and Outram who were in favour of an immediate attack on the disheartened nationalist troops in the town. He was nervous about Windham's position at Cawnpore; moreover he held that the best means of keeping in check the nationalist troops in Lucknow was to have a strong movable force outside the town. It was a wise decision. If he had followed the advice of Havelock and Outram to clear the town of Lucknow of the nationalist troops Cawnpore would have been lost and his force would have been cut off. There are however some critics who are of the view that this retrograde movement of Sir Colin's was a set-back. If he had retained his hold on Lucknow, the Oudh Talkudars would never have joined the nationalist troops *en masse*. His error of judgment prolonged the crisis for four months of the cold weather in India.\* The plain fact is that events in Lucknow and Cawnpore acted and reacted upon each other. It was Tatyá Tope's threat to seize Cawnpore and the bridge-of-boats which led to Sir Colin's retrograde movement and the saving from destruction of the nationalist troops in Lucknow. At the same time the speedy relief of the Lucknow Residency prejudiced Tatyá Tope's chances of seizing Cawnpore.

### *Retreat from Lucknow*

Sir Colin Campbell successfully carried out the task of evacuating the garrison. Shortly before dawn on November 21 the whole force safely returned to Dilkusha and moved to Alambagh on the 25th. Outram was left with about 4,000 men and 22 guns at Alambagh to overawe the nationalist troops in Lucknow. On the morning of November 27, Sir Colin proceeded to Cawnpore with three thousand men, and his huge unwieldy convoy, twelve miles in length. Camp was pitched at a place two miles beyond the Bani

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\* H. Davidson: **History and Services of the 78th Highlanders** (1901), Vol. I, p. 229



bridge. On November 28 the march was resumed but on receipt of alarming reports about the situation in Cawnpore the British force pushed on and encamped four miles from Cawnpore. Sir Colin and his staff however pushed forward and found to their immense relief that the bridge-of-boats was safe. On they sped and when they entered the entrenchment wild cheers of joy broke forth from the garrison, who were now assured that the crisis was over. The garrison was saved indeed in the nick of time.

Sir Colin's first care was to save the bridge-of-boats. Tatya Tope for once showed lack of energy in taking steps to destroy it. It remains a mystery as to why he did not bring forward his heavy guns on November 28 to destroy the bridge. It is true that it was dusk before Carthew's force had fallen back on the entrenchment. The nationalist troops were no doubt tired after being engaged in a severe action throughout the day. Tatya Tope probably thought that there would be no difficulty in directing the fire of the guns on the bridge the next morning. He miscalculated for he never got that chance. Captain Bouchier, commanding one of the field batteries in Sir Colin's force could not solve the mystery as to why Tatya Tope's troops, knowing that Sir Colin was on the way to Cawnpore, did not bring forward their guns to destroy the bridge. He could attribute it only to the intervention of Providence. "Providence whose merciful hand has been so wonderfully extended over us during this critical year, alone prevented their having brought, during the 28th, their heavy artillery to command the bridge of boats and the road on the opposite bank approaching it."\* Tatya Tope's failure to destroy the bridge-of-boats on November 28; the evacuation of the Shah Najaf mosque at a time when the British force was about to retire baffled and Sir Colin's decision to leave for Cawnpore immediately after the relief of the Residency instead of

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\* Bouchier: *Eight month's campaign*, p. 166

attempting to reduce Lucknow to submission were perhaps all acts of Providence to help the British cause.

Tatya Tope did realise—but rather too late—the importance of destroying the bridge-of-boats and thus preventing Sir Colin's force from crossing over to Cawnpore. On November 29 he ordered the heavy guns to be planted at favourable positions to bombard the bridge. The guns opened a heavy but ill-directed fire. But there was now not much chance of accomplishing this task since Sir Colin, equally alive to the importance of saving the bridge, had ordered the heavy guns to be pushed on to a point above the bridge-of-boats, whence they could play on Tatya Tope's guns. The artillery fire from the entrenchment was also directed to the same point. After a short but sharp artillery duel the British guns asserted their superiority. In the forenoon of November 29 the passage of the river began. No sooner had the troops stepped upon the first boat than Tatya Tope's troops increased their efforts to prevent the British force from crossing over to Cawnpore. The round shot plunged into the river on every side, but the bridge remained unstruck. The moment the column reached the other side Tatya Tope's troops opened on it musketry fire at very close range. Through a wave of shot, shell and bullets the column advanced to take up position near the old Dragoon Lines. The whole force succeeded in crossing safely over the bridge-of-boats by the evening of November 30. Sir Colin performed successfully "one of the most difficult of military operations, crossing a wide river in the face of an enemy thoroughly equipped with artillery."\*

### *Tatya Tope's Tactics*

Sir Colin could not attack Tatya Tope's troops, who held the city and the line of the canal, until the large convoy from Lucknow had been sent under an escort to Allahabad.

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\* Bouchier: op. cit., p. 166

At 10 o'clock on the night of December 3 the convoy moved off to Allahabad. Sir Colin took some time to organise his forces and it was not till December 6 that he decided to give battle to Tatya Tope's troops. Meanwhile Tatya was busy harassing the British troops. On December 1 his troops opened fire on the camp with shrapnel and inflicted some casualties. The following day they again cannonaded the camp very smartly. Brigadier Greathed's brigade, which had occupied General Gunj (an old bazaar of very great extent along the canal in front of the camp), supported by Peel's heavy guns and Bouchier's field battery however compelled Tatya Tope's troops to withdraw their guns to a safe distance. On December 4, Tatya Tope's troops attempted to burn the bridge-of-boats by floating fire-rafts down the stream. But the attempt was frustrated. On December 5 they attacked the British left picket. The attack was repulsed by the withering fire of a 24-pounder. Tatya Tope had harassed considerably the British troops but now the stage was set for deciding the issue between two well-matched forces.

Tatya Tope's whole strategy was governed by one fundamental consideration, *viz.* not to stake his entire army on the fortunes of a single battle. He was too astute a general not to have realised that the chances of winning a victory over Sir Colin's force were remote. He had failed to prevent the British force from crossing over the bridge-of-boats. He knew that Sir Colin was an experienced general and therefore he was not prepared to take the risk of losing his entire army by engaging in a keenly contested battle. Now that he had failed in his mission of seizing Cawnpore the best policy was to engage the British force in such a manner that if defeat stared him in the face he should be able to extricate his army out of an untenable position. It was with this aim in view that he deployed his forces. He formed them into two separate bodies, each having its own line of retreat: that of the left and centre, consisting of the Nana's followers, the remnants

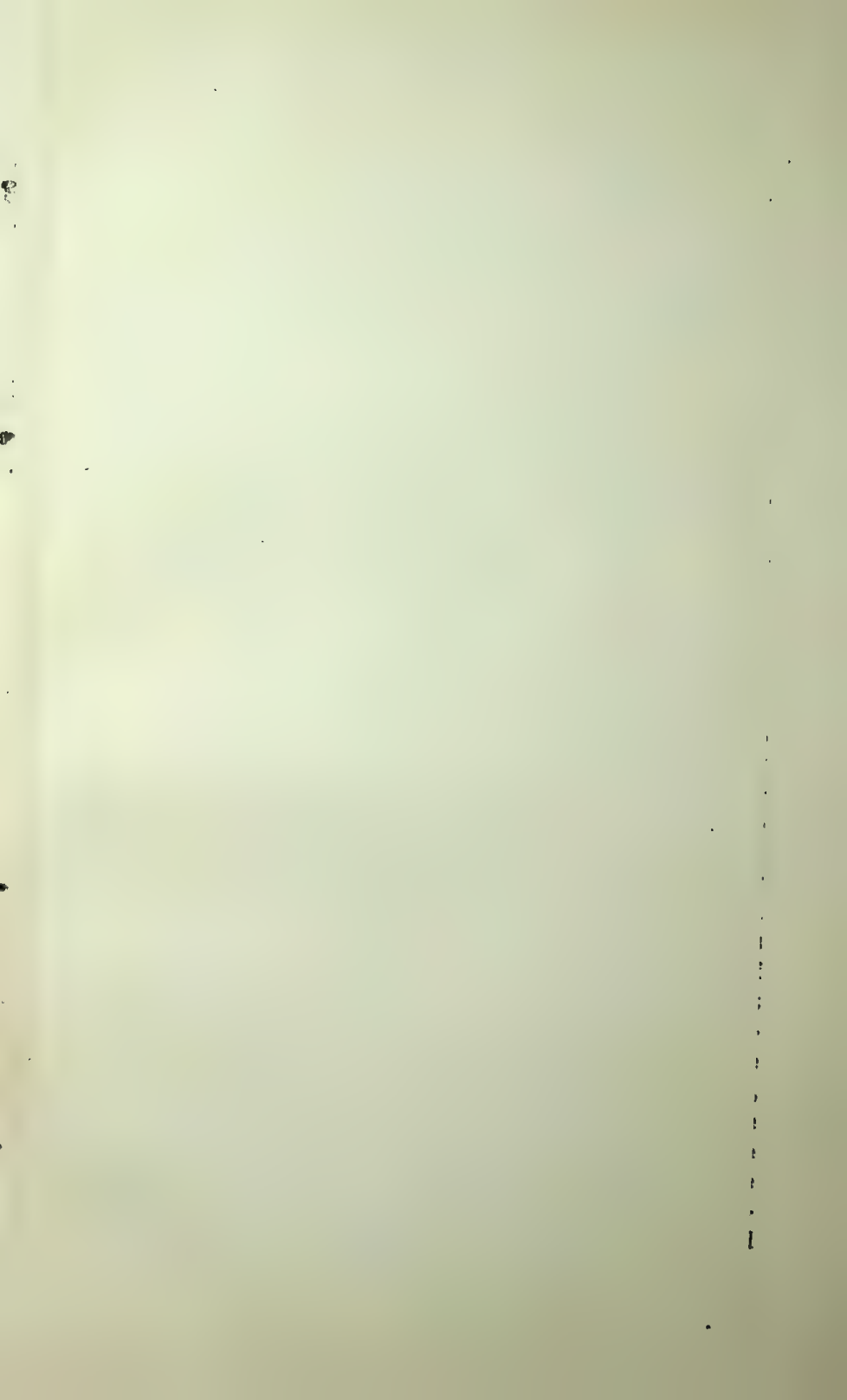
of various native regiments, and four regiments from Oudh, on Bithur; that of the right, the Gwalior Contingent, on Kalpi. Thus Tatya Tope deliberately disposed his forces in such a manner as to favour eccentric lines of retreat. This strategic deployment of the forces was faulty for it enabled Sir Colin to fall on one of the two separate forces and defeat it before help came from the other force. Nevertheless, in spite of its obvious disadvantages, it served Tatya Tope's main purpose of enabling him to extricate his forces intact after suffering a repulse.

Tatya Tope's force occupied a strong position. The left was strongly posted in the old cantonment, situated between the town and the Ganges. The ground studded with trees, intersected with ravines and covered with ruined bungalows was favourable for defence. The centre was in the town, whose streets were strongly barricaded, while that portion of it which abutted on the Ganges canal opposite the forward posts of the British force, was held in strength by the troops. The right stretched away behind the canal some distance beyond, where the Grand Trunk Road crossed it. The bridge over it and some brick-kilns and mounds of brick in its front were held by the troops. Two miles in the rear was the camp of the Gwalior Contingent covering the Kalpi road. The Gwalior Contingent was commanded by Tatya Tope in person.

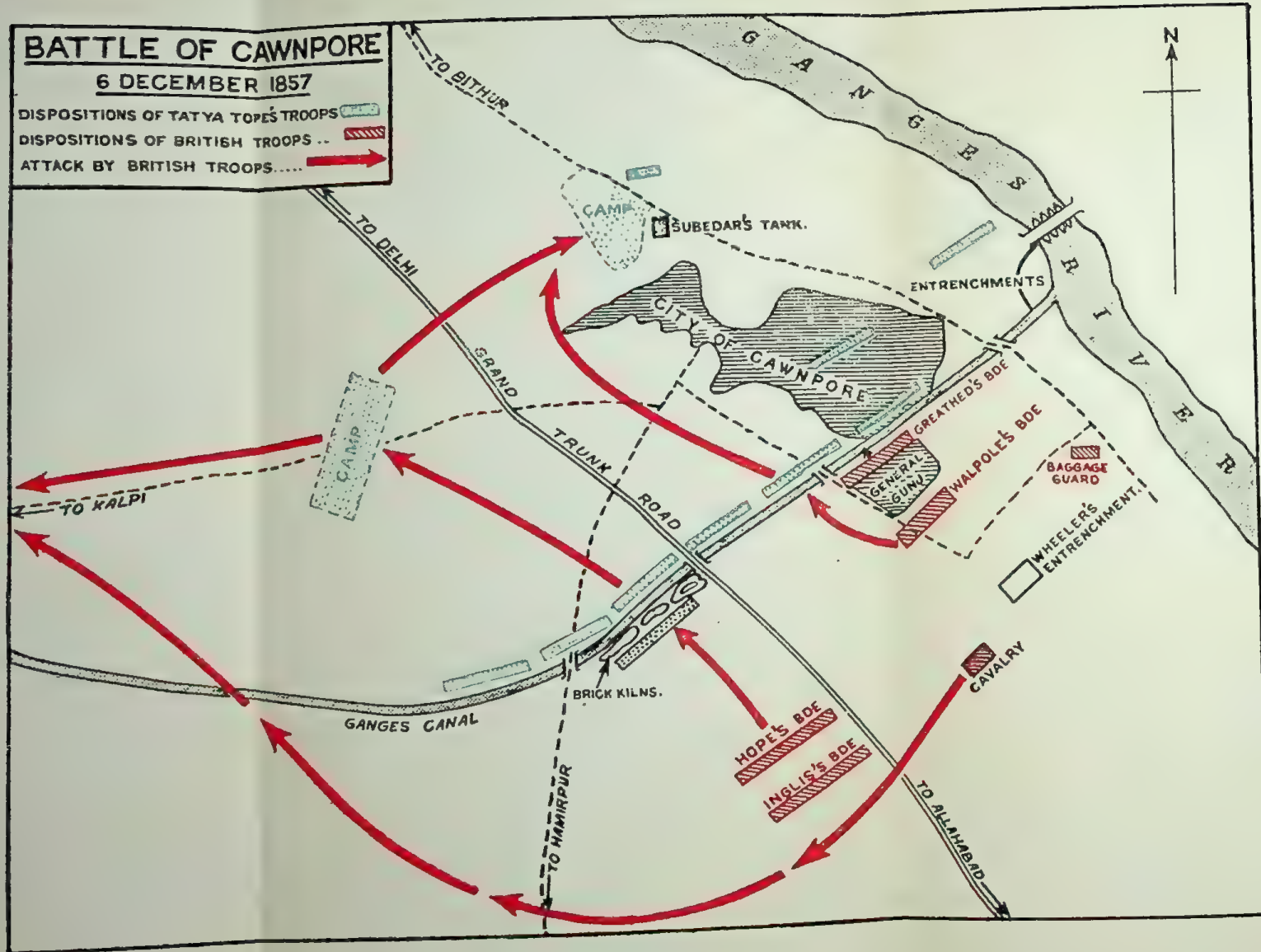
### *Sir Colin's Plan*

Sir Colin took full advantage of the weakness of the enemy defence. The enemy's position was strong to some extent for their left rested on the Ganges and their centre occupied the narrow streets of the city. It was their right, prolonged behind the canal into the plain which proved to be the chink in the strong armour. It was indeed the Achilles heel. On every account, tactical as well as strategic, the right offered the greatest promise of success. The position on the left and centre was formidable from its difficulty of approach but on the right the attack could be





# TATYA TOPE



made in the open plain, with only the canal—no serious impediment—intervening. The walls of the town would serve the double purpose of preventing the movement of troops from the left and centre in support of the right, and affording cover to the attacking columns. The retreat of the Gwalior Contingent would also be compromised by the British thrust towards the plain, through which ran the road to Kalpi. Sir Colin was too experienced a general not to take advantage of any weakness in the enemy's defence. His plan was simple but effective—to engage the enemy's left and centre with a sufficient force to create the impression that a powerful attack was developing from that direction and to launch the main attack on the right. Having defeated the enemy's right, his plan was to seize the camp of the Gwalior Contingent, establish himself upon its line of retreat, separate it from the Bithur force and defeat the two bodies in detail. The force at his disposal amounted to 5,000 infantry, 600 cavalry and 35 guns.

Sir Colin deployed his troops in such a manner as to carry out his plan of operations. His force was divided into two parts, each designed to carry out the task allotted to it. On the right were two brigades, whose role was to engage the enemy's left and centre and keep them engaged and thus to distract their attention from the main attack, which was to develop against the left. Thus Brigadier Greathed's Brigade (consisting of the 8th Foot and the 2nd Punjab Infantry) held the ground opposite the enemy's centre. In its rear was Walpole's Brigade (consisting of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions Rifle Brigade, and a detachment of the 38th Foot, supported by a field battery, Royal Artillery). The role of this brigade was to cross the bridge immediately to the left of Brigadier Greathed's position, advance skirting the walls of the town, and prevent the enemy from issuing from its gates in aid of the right. The main attack was to be made from the left. Here were concentrated two brigades—Hope's Brigade in front, consisting of the 53rd Foot, the 42nd Highlanders, the 93rd

Highlanders, and the 4th Punjab Infantry; and in the rear Inglis's Brigade consisting of the 23rd Fusiliers, the 32nd Foot and the 82nd Foot. The attacking brigades were to drive out the enemy entrenched in the brick mounds, forward of the bridge, capture the vital bridge and advance to the Kalpi road. In order to distract the enemy's attention and to induce him to believe that a powerful attack was developing from the left, Windham (from the entrenchment) was ordered to open a heavy bombardment on the enemy's left and centre.

### *The Battle of Cawnpore*

At 9 A.M. on December 6 the batteries in the entrenchment opened and were promptly answered by Tatyá Tope's guns. For two hours the artillery duel continued and then at 11 A.M. Sir Colin launched the attack. On the right the forward brigade (Greathed's) advanced to the line of the canal and poured a sharp fire of musketry on Tatyá's troops in the portion of the city abutting on the Ganges canal. At the same time the second brigade (under Walpole) crossed the bridge to the left of the first brigade and pushed on towards the city wall to prevent Tatyá Tope's troops on the left and in the centre from coming to the help of their threatened flank. It was on the right that the main blow fell in all the fury of its suddenness and severity. Here the artillery (Peel's 24-pounders, Longden's mortars, Bouchier's and Middleton's field batteries) opened a heavy fire upon the brick-kilns and great mounds, which sheltered Tatyá Tope's troops, who were ready to dispute the passage of the British force across the canal. Under cover of this terrific artillery fire the British force wheeled into three parallel lines fronting the canal. From behind the high brick mounds, thousands of Tatyá Tope's troops fired sharply. At the same time Tatyá Tope's guns, operated with precision and energy, sent a storm of shot and shell on the plain, over which the British force advanced to the attack. When the skirmishers approached the brick-kilns, Tatyá



Tope's troops opened on them a steady and determined fire, but the Sikhs and the British troops of the 53rd Regiment rushed on at the double and drove them from the mounds on to the bridge. Tatya Tope's troops had been pushed back from their advanced position, protected by the brick-kilns, but now they gave proof of their valour by fiercely defending the bridge. When the Sikhs and the 53rd advanced from the cover of the brick-kilns to launch a sudden attack on the bridge they were baffled, for Tatya Tope's troops ranged in many lines on the opposite side of the canal swept the bridge with musketry fire and grape. The advance of the British force was held up. The British troops would have been compelled to fall back if help had not come quickly. But help did come quickly for the gunners succeeded in pushing forward a heavy gun (24-pounder) across the bridge and brought it into action. Encouraged by this feat of bravery the troops of the two British brigades rushed forward and crossed the canal by the bridge or forded it. Swiftly resuming on the other side their line of formation they advanced to attack Tatya Tope's troops. But Tatya Tope proved too clever for them. He had been watching the issue of the battle and when he found that his troops had failed to prevent the British troops from crossing the canal, he ordered his entire force to retire in haste down the Kalpi road. This movement was swiftly and skilfully executed. It was 2 o'clock when the British force captured the camp of the Gwalior Contingent. Sir Colin took immediate steps to pursue Tatya Tope's troops. The 23rd and the 38th Regiments were assigned the task of guarding the captured camp. As the cavalry, which had been ordered to cross the canal by a bridge further to the left in order to cut off the retreat of Tatya Tope's troops had not yet arrived, having been misled by a guide, Bouchier's battery, accompanied by Sir Hope Grant and his staff set out in pursuit of Tatya Tope's troops for two miles when the cavalry appeared and continued the pursuit till the Pandu Nadi. But the pursuit was of no avail. The baggage and the *impedimenta* were left behind but other-

wise practically the entire force of Tatyá Tope escaped without losses from the battle-field. It certainly reflects much credit on Tatyá Tope. He lost the battle of Cawnpore but he managed to extricate his force from an untenable position.

Meanwhile his other force also managed to retreat by the Bithur road. Sir Colin had ordered Mansfield to strike at the Nana's troops on the Bithur road. Mansfield's force consisting of the Rifles, the 93rd Regiment, and Longden's Heavy and Middleton's Field Battery moved round the back of the town to attack the Nana's troops at the Subedar's Tank so as to cut off their retreat to Bithur. The Nana's troops surrendered successive positions without fighting. On reaching a village close to the Subedar's Tank, Middleton's battery galloped through it and taking position on the plain opened fire upon the Nana's guns and masses of infantry in full retreat along the Bithur road. The Rifles ran up to Middleton's support and the position was occupied, Brigadier Hope coming up with the reserve of Highlanders and taking charge of the pickets, which were thrown out on the line of the enemy's retreat. The commander of the nationalist force finding his retreat compromised brought up artillery from the old cantonment and opened fire on the position. When Longden's and Middleton's batteries almost succeeded in silencing these guns, some of the Nana's guns opened up from the broken ground of the plain on exactly the opposite side. They were quickly answered. The Nana's guns had however saved the situation from deteriorating. At dusk large bodies of the Nana's infantry and cavalry moved round to the west of the British position about a mile distant in full retreat along the Bithur road. Mansfield failed to prevent their escape.

### *Loss of the Guns*

Tatyá Tope had extricated safely his forces. Sir Colin however took steps to pursue the force retreating by the

Bithur road. On December 8 he sent a column under Hope Grant to overtake and defeat the Nana's troops. The force consisted of 2,054 infantry, 521 cavalry and 100 sappers. The infantry comprised the 4th Brigade of Infantry consisting of the 42nd Highlanders, the 53rd Foot, the 93rd Highlanders, and the 4th Punjab Infantry. The Cavalry comprised the 9th Lancers, the 5th Punjab Cavalry and Hudson's Horse. The artillery consisted of Middleton's field battery and Remmington's troop of Horse Artillery. Hope Grant was directed to proceed to Bithur, but in case he got the information that the Nana's troops had gone towards the Serai Ghat (a ferry about 25 miles above Cawnpore on the Ganges) he was to divert his force to that place. Grant started in the afternoon and on receipt of information about the movements of the Nana's troops, changed the direction of his march, and proceeded to Sheorajpur, a village on the road within three miles of Serai Ghat, where he halted the force till daylight. Then he pushed forward towards the river. As he neared the ferry he saw the Nana's troops preparing to embark their guns. Immediately he ordered up the cavalry and the guns. Two guns of the field battery reached the dry bank of the river and under a very severe fire from thirteen of the Nana's guns, opened fire. Soon after Remmington's troop galloped up, and took up a good position, which was covered by the bank of a ditch. Remmington's troop opened on the Nana's guns and troops a flanking fire. The field battery also came up. In half an hour the Nana's guns were silenced. The Nana's cavalry came up to capture the British guns but they were dispersed by the British cavalry. The Nana's force managed to escape but their artillery, amounting to fifteen guns, fell into the British hands.

The British historians have paid high tribute to Sir Colin Campbell for his brilliant strategy in fixing the enemy's attention upon the centre, while he isolated their left and centre, and with a swift driving stroke broke their right. They have however done scant justice to the tactics

of Tatya Tope. Tatya Tope undoubtedly suffered a reverse but he prevented Sir Colin from reaping the fruits of victory. The Gwalior Contingent was beaten but not destroyed—their numerical loss, owing to their rapid flight, being very inconsiderable. The Nana's troops also escaped without serious losses. Only the baggage and the guns fell into the British hands. Tatya Tope's skill in effecting this wonderful retreat after sustaining a reverse redounds to his credit.

### *Nationalist Leaders of Western Malwa*

The end of the year marked the turn in the tide of the fortunes of the nationalist forces. Delhi had fallen, the relief of the Lucknow Residency had been accomplished and Tatya Tope's mighty effort to seize Cawnpore had been foiled. At the same time the nationalist forces in Malwa had also suffered a defeat. The story now reverts to the part played by the nationalist forces in Malwa to stem the tide of the British advance. We have described in a previous chapter how a British column under Major-General Woodburn had left Poona on June 8, 1857 and had arrived at Aurangabad on June 23 just in time to quell the mutiny of the 1st Cavalry, Hyderabad Contingent. On July 12 it resumed its march to Asirgarh, where Brigadier S. S. Stuart took over its command. Crossing the Narbada the column arrived at Mhow on August 2 and remained there till the rainy season was over. The column had been strengthened by fresh reinforcements—the 3rd Cavalry, Hyderabad Contingent and 250 bayonets of the 86th. The timely relief of Mhow was of great importance for it gave to the British an important base of operations.

While the British force remained at Mhow the nationalist leaders—Prince Feroze Shah of the Imperial family of Delhi, and Ram Chander Bapuji, the Minister of the Dhar State, consolidated their positions in order to check the British advance. When Prince Feroze Shah wearing the garb of a pilgrim from Mecca, appeared with a few follo-



wers at Mandasor on August 26, a detachment of Sindhia's troops and a large number of Afghans gave him a royal welcome and installed him on the Masnad. Ardent nationalists and adventurers flocked from far and near to the standard of the Prince so that in an incredibly short time (i.e. in almost a month) he had gathered around him a formidable force of 18,000 men. The Prince grew bolder and in October decided to capture Nimach, an important cantonment garrisoned by two squadrons of the 2nd Bombay Light Cavalry, detachments of the 83rd Foot and the 12th Bombay Native Infantry, some native levies and four guns. The Prince seized the town of Jiran, twelve miles south of Nimach. On October 23 he defeated and drove back into Nimach a small force that had advanced to check its progress. At the head of a force of 4,000 men the Prince occupied the station of Nimach forcing the garrison to take refuge within a fortified square. He failed to capture this defensive position and after fifteen days retired to meet the British force, which was advancing from Mhow towards Mandasor.

The brunt of the British attack was borne by the troops of the Dhar State. As the ruler of the Dhar State was a lad of thirteen years of age, the administration was carried on by his Minister, Ram Chander Bapuji, a shrewd and intelligent man, who took up the nationalist cause. He enlisted large numbers of Arabs, Afghans and Mekranis and it was with the help of this newly raised force that he resolved to defend the fort of Dhar. The British force advanced from Mhow on October 20 to attack and capture this fort. The nationalist troops fought valiantly and it was not till October 31 that the fort was captured. A large part of the nationalist force slipped away at night from the fort.

### *The Heroism of the Rohillas*

After the capture of the fort of Dhar the Malwa Column was joined by the Hyderabad Contingent Field Force,

which had been assembled at Idalabad in July for the protection of North Berar. This force, under the command of Major Orr, was composed of the 1st and 4th Cavalry; 1st, 2nd and 4th companies Artillery, two howitzers, and a wing each of the 3rd and 5th Infantry — all of the Hyderabad Contingent. Thus reinforced the British force continued its march through Western Malwa towards Mandasor.

Prince Feroze Shah was also taking steps to strengthen his position. On November 8 his force attacked the cantonment of Mehidpur, garrisoned by troops of the Malwa Contingent, commanded by British officers. The majority of the Contingent refused to attack their brethren. As the Prince's troops approached, the Subedar-Major of the Contingent opened his jacket, took out a green flag and hoisted it. That was the signal for the larger portion of the Malwa Contingent to go over to the side of the nationalist troops. Only a portion of the artillery stood to their guns but these were easily captured.

Major Orr at the head of a small force pushed on ahead of the British column and on arrival at Mehidpur found that the nationalist troops had left that place. He overtook them in the village of Rawal, at a distance of twelve miles. The Prince's troops had taken up a strong position. The contest was fierce and continued till the sun went down. The Afghans offered strong resistance. They fought to the bitter end. The battle continued until late in the evening when the Prince's troops disappeared in the tall crops of the sugar-cane. 150 of the Prince's troops lay dead on the field. The British loss was 100 killed and wounded.

On November 21 the British force took up position four miles south of Mandasor. Prince Feroze Shah's troops advanced from Mandasor to attack the British force but were repulsed and retired to Mandasor. Meanwhile 5,000 of their comrades, who had been besieging Nimach, were hurrying back to their succour. To prevent a junction of

the nationalist forces, the British force advanced on November 24 to the west of the town of Mandasor and found that the Prince's troops coming from Nimach had taken up a strong position in the village of Goraria. They showed considerable skill in the disposition of their forces for their right rested on the village, their centre was on a long hill, and their left was well covered by fields of uncut grain and broken ground. The British guns opened up on the nationalist troops. The artillery duel lasted for some time. Meanwhile the nationalist infantry made a bold attack, which was repulsed. Then the cavalry of the British force charged the guns but failed to capture them. A second charge was however successful and the guns were captured. Contesting every inch of the ground the nationalist troops fell back on the village. As the British force advanced to the village they suffered heavy casualties from the musketry fire of the nationalist troops, who lay concealed in the nullas. When they approached the village they were greeted with a heavy musketry fire. They however pressed on and fought their way into the village but soon had to retire in confusion on account of heavy musketry fire. Meanwhile the nationalist troops garrisoning Mandasor had made a determined attack on the British rear guard, which was repulsed with difficulty. Next day on November 24 the British force recommenced the attack on the fortified village of Goraria. The British heavy guns (the-18-pounder and 24-pounder howitzers) opened on the strong defensive position at 10 o'clock. The houses were almost razed to the ground but the gallant Rohillas fought heroically till they were all exterminated. While the Rohillas were thus gallantly fighting, Prince Feroze Shah and his two thousand Afghans and Mekranis evacuated Mandasor and fell back on Nangarh. The British force returned to Indore, where Holkars' disaffected regular cavalry, as well as a thousand men of Holkars' infantry were disarmed. The Malwa Field Force had successfully carried out the task of restoring the British authority in Western Malwa.

### *Operations in Rajputana*

The nationalist troops made some gains in Rajputana. It has been related in a previous chapter how the nationalist troops at Nasirabad and Nimach had gone to the succour of their brethren in Delhi. Early in June small reinforcements arrived in Rajputana from Deesa, thus enabling Brigadier Lawrence to maintain small garrisons at Nimach, Nasirabad, Ajmer and Mount Abu. The nationalist movement however gained in momentum. The first to espouse the nationalist cause was the Jodhpur Legion, which consisted of 3 troops of cavalry, 11 companies of infantry and two 9-pounder guns. On August 21 a portion of this Legion went over to the nationalist side and attacked Mount Abu. After suffering a repulse they made off to Erinpura, the headquarters of the Legion. Here they were successful in their effort to persuade the main body to support the nationalist cause. They then rallied under the banner of the Thakur of Awah, one of the prominent nationalist leaders of Rajputana. Lawrence collected a force at Beawar in order to crush the nationalist force in co-operation with the Marwar troops. The force reached Awah on September 18 but returned discomfited because the defensive position occupied by the nationalist troops was too strong to be attacked. The Jodhpur Legion remained at Awah till October 10 when it advanced towards Jhajjar. A brigade from Delhi attacked it at Narnaul. The Legion fought gallantly for several hours but was defeated.

The nationalist movement made progress at Kotah also. On October 15 the State troops at Kotah murdered the British Resident, took possession of the town and besieged the palace in which the Maharao sought refuge.

### *The Turn of the Tide*

The end of the year marked a definite turn of the tide of fortune in favour of the British forces. For the nationalist forces the year ended on a note of gloom and



despondency. Delhi had fallen, the relief of the Lucknow Residency had been accomplished, Tatyá Tope's mighty effort to seize Cawnpore had been frustrated, and Western Malwa had been subdued. Only in Rajputana the nationalist forces seem to have made some headway. In spite of these set-backs it must be said to the credit of the nationalist leaders that they continued the struggle with unshakable faith and grim determination.

## Chapter VIII

# TO THE RESCUE

### *British Strategy*

AFTER his defeat at Cawnpore on December 6, 1857 Tatya Tope extricated his force with great skill and ingenuity to Kalpi. He now transferred his activities to Bundelkhand, leaving the Nana, the Begum of Oudh, the Maulvi of Fyzabad, Khan Bahadur Khan and Kunwar Singh to carry on the struggle in the Doab, Rohilkhand, Oudh and Bihar. These and a host of other determined leaders were resolved to carry on the war to the bitter end. Meanwhile the British authorities were laying down the outlines of a far-reaching strategy. The general plan was that a force known as the Central India Field Force (with the Malwa Field Force as nucleus) under the command of Major-General Sir Hugh Rose was to assemble on the Narbada and be directed against Chanderi, Jhansi and Kalpi. On its left was to operate another force, the Rajputana Field Force (under the command of Major-General H. G. Roberts) which was to advance from the Bombay Presidency on Nasirabad, after clearing the nationalist troops from Awah and Kotah. A third force, the Saugor Field Force, consisting of Madras troops, under Brigadier G. C. Whitlock, was to operate on Sir Hugh Rose's right—it was to assemble at Kampti, relieve Saugor and sweep through Bundelkhand. Sir Colin Campbell, the Commander-in-Chief, was to subjugate Oudh and Rohilkhand. First he was to capture Fatehgarh, thus threatening both Oudh and Rohilkhand. Then while keeping up pressure against the nationalist forces in Rohilkhand he was to concentrate his forces for the final capture of Lucknow.

*Tatya Tope's Strategy*

The defeat which Tatya Tope suffered at Cawnpore on December 6, 1857 did not in any way affect the efficiency or the strength of his force. He had succeeded in extricating practically his entire force. He now made Kalpi his headquarters for organising resistance in Central India i.e. the tract of the country lying between the Jumna and the Narbada. Tatya Tope had the good fortune to work in co-operation with the Rani of Jhansi for the freedom of the country. The Rani was a capable ruler and an ardent patriot. After seizing Jhansi in June 1857 she had considerably improved the administration. She had also taken steps to improve the efficiency of her army, by raising fresh troops, casting cannon and strengthening the defences of the fort and city of Jhansi. The task facing Tatya Tope and his ally, the Rani of Jhansi, was indeed formidable for at the beginning of 1858 the British forces were advancing into Central India after routing the nationalist troops in Western Malwa. Tatya faced with quiet confidence the threat of the advance of the British columns. He and his ally, the Rani of Jhansi, were ably assisted by two capable nationalist leaders—the Nawab of Banda and the Raja of Banpur. By the strategic deployment of his force Tatya Tope established his claim to be regarded as a great strategist. Kalpi was the most important nationalist stronghold. As long as Tatya Tope retained Kalpi he could threaten the British base at Cawnpore. Next was the strong fortress of Jhansi, garrisoned by 11,000 brave nationalist troops. Tatya Tope defeated the troops of the Raja of Charkhari (who was loyal to the British Government), captured the town of Charkhari and besieged the Raja in the fort. Tatya Tope purposely concentrated his force of 20,000 men, including the redoubtable Gwalior Contingent, at Charkhari to enable him to attack the British force in case it besieged Jhansi. The chief aim of his strategy was to confuse and mislead the enemy so that in case the latter attacked

Jhansi, he could march to its relief and seriously threaten the British force. Tatyā Tope hoped that his able lieutenants—the Raja of Banpur and the Nawab of Banda—would delay the advance of the British columns towards Jhansi and Kalpi. The Raja of Banpur was a very determined and courageous leader. He had collected a force of 10,000 men and had established his authority over the greater part of the territories of Saugor. The British garrison of 360 men, women and children had been besieged for about seven months but the siege had not been carried on with vigour. The Raja of Banpur had strategically deployed his troops so as to check the advance of the British columns. The forward post was at Rahatgarh, 24 miles from Saugor. The fort of Rahatgarh was garrisoned by Velaitees (Afghans), Mekranis and Bundelas, ably led by the Nawab of Amarpani and the Talukdar of Sallujpur. In order to render timely help to the garrison of Rahatgarh, the Raja of Banpur took up position at the head of a large force in the village of Barodia. His force was commanded by Amant Singh—a capable general. If the British force captured these two forward positions—Rahatgarh and Barodia—and advanced to the relief of Saugor then its advance was to be checked by the nationalist troops in the fort of Garhakota, about 25 miles east of Saugor. The garrison of Garhakota consisted of the sepoys of the 51st and 52nd Bengal Infantry Regiments and local levies. If the British force secured Saugor as well as the fort of Garhakota then the plan of the Raja of Banpur was to prevent it from advancing to Jhansi by defending the three strong passes at Narut, Dhāmōney and Madinpur, leading into Bundelkhand. If these passes were turned by the British force then the plan was for the nationalist troops to retire to the fort of Chanderi. In case this fort had already fallen into the British hands the nationalist troops were to fall back on Jhansi. The Nawab of Banda, at the head of a large force of 9,000 men was to check the advance of the British column advancing from Jubbulpore.



*Advance of the British Force to Saugor*

The Central India Field Force, of which Sir Hugh Rose took command on December 17, 1857, consisted of two brigades, the First being at Mhow, the Second at Sehere. The First Brigade, under the command of Brigadier C. S. Stuart of the Bombay Army, was composed of a squadron of the 14th Light Dragoons, a troop of the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry, two regiments of cavalry, Hyderabad Contingent, two companies of the 86th Regiment, the 25th Regiment Bombay Native Infantry, one infantry regiment of the Hyderabad Contingent, three light field batteries and some sappers. The Second Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Stewart, 14th Light Dragoons, was composed of the headquarters of the 14th Light Dragoons, headquarters of the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry, one regiment of cavalry, Hyderabad Contingent, the 3rd Bombay European Regiment, the 24th Bombay Native Infantry, one regiment of infantry, Hyderabad Contingent, a battery of Horse Artillery, one light field-battery, one battery Bhopal artillery, one company Madras Sappers, a detachment of Bombay Sappers and a siege-train.

On January 16, 1858 Sir Hugh Rose started from Sehere for the relief of Saugor. First he had to capture the strong fort of Rahatgarh. Situated on the spur of a long hill the fort commanded the country surrounding it. The east and south faces were almost perpendicular, the rock being scarp-ed and strengthened by the Bina, a deep rapid river running close beneath the walls from east to west. On January 24, Sir Hugh Rose arrived before the place. The nationalist troops had taken up position in the town and on the banks of the river. After a short struggle they retired into the fort. Sir Hugh Rose invested the fort—the Bhopal levies fronting the eastern face, the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry and the Hyderabad Contingent Cavalry facing the northern face and the remainder of the force occupying the plain across which ran the road to Saugor.

On January 26 Sir Hugh Rose, at the head of the 3rd Europeans (supported by guns) crossed the Saugor road and entered the jungle. Here he almost fell into a trap laid for him, for the nationalist troops who had been hiding nearby, fired the jungle-grass on all sides. Sir Hugh Rose however extricated his force. He then ordered the Sappers to construct a road for siting the guns to fire shot and shell into the fort. The British guns maintained a constant fire of shot and shell on the fort. Just when a large breach was made at 10 P.M. on January 28 the Raja of Banpur advanced at the head of a large force for the relief of the garrison. His troops however retired after a short struggle. The Raja's failure to relieve the garrison disheartened them so that they evacuated the fort during the night and escaped by a precipitous path.

Sir Hugh Rose set out for Barodia on January 31. The troops of the Raja of Banpur had been reinforced by the garrison of Rahatgarh. Large numbers of the Raja's troops lay concealed in the thick jungle covering the ford of the Bina and opened a rapid fusillade on the advance British guard. The shells from the British guns bursting in their midst failed to dislodge them from this vantage ground and it was only when the 3rd Bombay European Regiment advanced to charge with the bayonet that they fell back on a second position, where though their flanks were covered, their centre lay open. A spirited charge upon their weak spot drove them back towards Barodia. When the British pressure proved too strong the Raja's troops made good their escape. They fled to defend the passes which led into Bundelkhand. Sir Hugh Rose in his Despatch paid high tribute to the stubborn resistance offered by the nationalist troops. "The valaitees and Pathans fought with their accustomed courage, several of them, even when dying, springing from the ground and inflicting mortal wounds with their broad swords."\*

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\* From Sir Hugh Rose to Colonel Green, A. G. of the Army.

The capture of Rahatgarh, followed by the defeat of the troops of the Raja of Banpur, enabled Sir Hugh Rose to advance to the relief of the British garrison of Saugor. This task was accomplished on February 3. On February 9 Sir Hugh Rose marched to capture the fort of Garhakota. After vainly trying to check the British advance by keeping up a running fight the nationalist troops retired into the fort. Discouraged by the steady fire of the British guns and mortars the garrison slipped away under cover of darkness and made good their escape.

### *The Defence of the Passes*

Having failed to prevent the British force from relieving Saugor the Raja of Banpur now resolved to block Sir Hugh Rose's further advance at the three passes leading into Bundelkhand. As the direct road to Jhansi (125 miles distant to the north) led over the difficult pass at Narut, the Raja of Banpur thought that the British force would cross into Bundelkhand by this pass. He therefore took steps to strengthen its natural defences "by barricading the road with abatis and parapets made of large boulders of rock 15 feet thick; all passages by the sides of the road being made impracticable by the almost precipitous hills covered with jungle which came down to the edge of the road."\* The Raja of Banpur defended this pass with 10,000 men. Twenty miles from Narut was the Madinpur Pass, the weakest of the three passes, which was held in strength by the nationalist troops led by the Raja of Shahgarh. This force included the sepoys of the 52nd and other Bengal Infantry Regiments and 7,000 picked Bundelas. The difficult pass of Dhamooney was also held by the nationalist troops. The nationalist troops were however mainly concentrated at the two passes of Narut and Madinpur.

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\* From Sir Hugh Rose to Major-General Mansfield—March 26, 1858

In order to deceive the nationalist troops as to his intention, and to prevent the Raja of Banpur from coming from the pass of Narut to the assistance of the Raja of Shahgarh, who defended the Madinpur pass, Sir Hugh Rose made a feint attack against Narut by sending a small force to the fort and town of Malthone, just above the pass of Narut, while with the main force he marched against the pass of Madinpur. The latter was formed by a sudden descent of the road into a deep glen thickly wooded. To the right, further on, the road ran along the side of a lake. The left of the road was lined by rocky and precipitous hills. Hundreds of nationalist troops, who lay concealed in the glen, opened a heavy fire on the British guns when they were moved up incautiously to within fifty or seventy yards of the edge of the glen. Several artillery-men were wounded. When the guns were however moved out of the range of their muskets, Sir Hugh Rose ordered the infantry to charge into the glen and clear it of the nationalist troops. Driven from the glen the nationalist troops crossed the road to join their comrades, who were occupying in strength the hills, divided by ravines, on the left of the road. The British troops stormed the heights and drove them successively from all the hills commanding the pass. Driven from the pass the nationalist troops fell back on the fortified village of Madinpur, to the rear of the end of the lake, where they had a battery of some guns. A few rounds from the British guns caused them to beat a hasty retreat through the jungle. By his fine strategy Sir Hugh Rose had won an important victory. His force had got into the rear of the passes and the line of defences, thus turning the pass of Narut, which was considered to be impregnable by the nationalist troops.\* The effect of this victory was great. Sir Hugh Rose was able to advance towards Jhansi without opposition. By the first week of March he secured Surahi (the fortified palace of the Raja of Shahgarh) and the fort of Maranra, which commanded the high road be-

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\* Ibid.



tween Saugor and Jhansi. On March 10 he captured the palace of the Raja of Banpur and on March 14 he arrived at Talbahat. Here the 2nd Brigade halted to effect a junction with the 1st Brigade.

### *Defence of Chanderi*

After the loss of the passes leading into Bundelkhand the nationalist troops fell back on Chanderi to check the advance of the 1st Brigade, and thus to prevent it from effecting a junction with the 2nd Brigade for the attack on Jhansi. The fort of Chanderi, situated on a high hill, was suitable for offering prolonged resistance. It consisted of a strong rampart of sandstone, flanked by circular towers. Twelve guns were mounted on its walls. It was to capture this strong fort that the 1st Brigade left Mhow on January 10, 1858. Marching along the Agra road the British force reached Guna on January 26. About 70 miles to the east of Guna was the fort and town of Chanderi. On March 5 the British force encamped near a small village, short of the town. Next day the artillery opened with round shot and shell on the nationalist troops, who had taken up position in a ruined temple and some houses. Driven from this position they retired through the jungle and took shelter behind a strong wall, which extended from one ridge of the hills to another opposite, the valley intervening. The wall was loopholed, and furnished with bastions, twelve or fourteen feet in height and several in thickness. The British field-pieces failed to make any impression on the masonry but the attack by the infantry was successful, and the nationalist troops retreated to the town and the fort, about half a mile distant. The British force encamped on one of the hills, which commanded the fort on the west side. For the next few days men were employed in clearing out the surrounding villages, in reconnoitring, and in placing guns in favourable positions. The British field-guns and mortars opened fire on the palace in the fort. But the guns,

well served by the nationalist gunners, "replied well, and with good practice; neither could they be silenced."\* It now became necessary to make a road along the crest of the ridge in order to get the heavy guns in position to breach the fort. It was not an easy task for the men were very much exposed to the fire, there being no other protection than trees. The 24-pounder guns were dragged up by elephants on March 10. Keenly alive to the new danger that threatened them, the garrison made a successful demonstration. On the night of March 10 a party of the nationalist troops sallied out of the fort and recapture the wall and temple, where they had earlier made a bold stand. The 25th Regiment Bombay Native Infantry was sent to deal with this threat. They succeeded in clearing the nationalist troops from this position. Meanwhile the nationalist troops in the fort kept up an incessant fire, both from their cannon and small arms, upon the breaching battery, which was nearest the fort. One of the nationalist troops armed with a European rifle took a heavy toll of the men in the British force. The bullocks bringing up ammunition afforded excellent mark to the sharpshooters. The garrison had a very large number of guns and wall-pieces, extending completely round the fortifications. The shells from the British guns fell thick and fast into the fort but did not inflict many casualties for the fort was large and the troops had plenty of space and shelter to escape from there. They had also an underground passage down the rock into the town close beneath whereby they got both provisions and water. "The breaching went on but slowly, for the round tower chosen was solid, and offered good resistance to the shot."† On the evening of March 16 a practicable breach was made and the next morning the British troops launched the attack. In spite of a heavy fire the assailants rushed to the breach and

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\* J. H. Sylvester: *Recollections of the Campaign in Malwa and Central India* (1860), p. 75

† Sylvester, p. 79

climbed up the scaling-ladders into the fort. After a desperate resistance the nationalist troops hurriedly escaped from the fort by the underground passage through the town. On March 19 the 1st Brigade marched towards Jhansi to effect a junction with the 2nd Brigade.

### *Tatya Tope's Fine Strategy*

The Raja of Banpur and his able lieutenants had not been successful in checking the British advance towards Jhansi. But now Sir Hugh Rose had to deal with Tatya Tope and his energetic ally, the Rani of Jhansi. Tatya Tope's brilliant strategy placed the British authorities on the horns of a dilemma—they were perplexed as to whether the first blow should be struck against Tatya Tope or the Rani of Jhansi. Sir Hugh Rose was in favour of besieging the fortress of Jhansi. On hearing of the fall of Chanderi he marched on March 19 to Chanchanpur, at a distance of fourteen miles from Jhansi. Next day he sent an advance guard of cavalry, horse artillery and light field-guns of the 2nd Brigade to reconnoitre and invest Jhansi. He was about to follow with his infantry, when he received two despatches—one from Lord Canning (the Governor-General of India) and the second from the Commander-in-Chief, ordering him to divert his force to Charkhari to deal with Tatya Tope and thus help the loyal Raja of Charkhari. Sir Hugh Rose was in a fix. He could not disobey the order and at the same time he did not consider it advisable to divert his force to Charkhari. Sir Robert Hamilton, the Governor-General's Agent at Indore, who accompanied the British force, took upon himself the responsibility of ordering the continuance of the movement on Jhansi for he strongly felt that it would be a great political mistake to draw off from Jhansi. Accordingly Sir Hugh Rose moved on to Jhansi on March 21. The city was invested on March 22. Thus Sir Hugh Rose began the siege of Jhansi, leaving Tatya Tope free to advance from Charkhari to the relief of Jhansi.

### *The Fort of Jhansi*

The Rani had made full preparations for the grim struggle. She had been able to raise a large and formidable force of 10,000 Bundelas and Velaitees (Afghans), and 1,500 sepoy of the Bengal Army, of whom 400 were cavalry. She had also about thirty or forty guns and a large number of skilled gunners (two companies of Golundaz) commanded by a first-rate Artillery-man. The nationalist troops led by the gallant Rani were resolved to hold the fort and the city at all costs. Sheltered behind the fort and the city walls they hoped to check effectively the advance of the British force. The fort stood on an elevated rock, rising out of the plain, and thus commanded the city and the surrounding country. It was built of excellent and most massive masonry. It was difficult to breach, because it was composed of granite and its walls were quite thick—from sixteen to twenty feet. There were extensive and elaborate outworks of the same solid construction. These outworks had front and flanking embrasures for artillery fire and loopholes for musketry. Guns placed on the high towers of the fort commanded the country all around. One of these towers called the 'white turret' was armed with heavy ordnance. The fort was surrounded by the city of Jhansi on all sides, except the west and part of the south face. The west face was protected by a steep rock. The south face was protected by the fortified city wall (with strong bastions) running south from the centre of the south face and ending in a high mound or mamelon. The latter was a very strong position, being a piece of elevated ground, with an abrupt slope towards the British position and a gradual one inwards towards the fort. The mound was fortified by a strong circular bastion, and was a continuation of the city ramparts, which were very high at this point, and crenellated, as at every other, for musketry. The muzzles of five guns peeped through the embrasures of the mound; they were closed until the guns opened. The embrasures were further strengthened by heavy piles and



logs of wood. At the foot of the bastion in front was a deep ditch of masonry, 12 feet deep and 15 feet broad. Thus the great strength of the fort, natural as well as artificial, and its extent, inspired confidence in the garrison. The city of Jhansi had also strong defences. The city was about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles in circumference and was surrounded by a fortified and massive wall, from 6 to 12 feet thick, and varying in height from 18 to 30 feet. The wall had numerous flanking bastions armed as batteries with ordnance. The wall was also loopholed for musketry fire.

Thus not only the fort but the city also had strong defences. These defences were still further improved by the setting up of thirteen batteries—including the 'white turret' and the 'tree tower' batteries in the fort and the 'wheel tower,' 'Saugor-gate' and 'Lachman-gate' batteries in the town. There was a 'garden battery' on a rock to the rear of the west wall of the city. The 'mound' battery was by far the most important for it enfladed two walls of the city, and commanded the whole of the south quarter of it, including the palace.

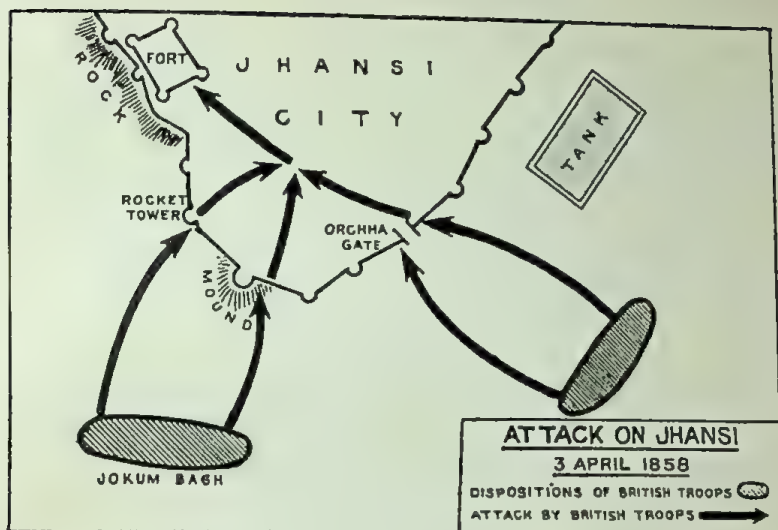
Outside the walls, the city was girt with wood, except some parts of the east and south fronts: on the former was a picturesque lake and water-palace; to the south were the ruined cantonments and residencies of the English. Two rocky hillocks rose from the plain on the south of the town; that on the east to the south of the lake and opposite the Orchha gate, that on the west 640 yards distant from the fort, the summit of which was on the same level as their highest points. Between these two hillocks lay a line of lesser mamelons and temples with gardens, one of these being the Jokum Bagh.

### *Attack on Jhansi*

Sir Hugh Rose was well aware of the strong defences of the fort and the city of Jhansi. The attack on Jhansi offered indeed serious difficulties. The fort

could not be breached except from the south, which was however well protected, flanked as it was by the fortified city wall and the mound. The hillock on the west was excellent for a breaching battery, except that it was too far off (640 yards), and that the fire from it would have been oblique. It was the mound which really barred the entrance to the city and the fort. It was therefore necessary to capture it. The possession of this important position would pave the way for the capture of the south of the city and of the palace. Therefore Sir Hugh's plan was to surround the city with strong pickets and to concentrate a heavy fire on the mound and on the south of the city, in order to drive the Rani's troops out of them, then to breach the wall close to the mound, and to dismantle the defences, which protected the mound.

This plan of the operation was systematically carried out. On March 22 the cavalry occupied seven flying camps, forming a ring of mutually supporting outposts. There was one large outpost on the most distant side of the town and there was another opposite the water-palace. All egress or ingress to the besieged was at an end. Preparations now began for the setting up of batteries on the east hillock (designated the Right Attack) and the west hillock (designated the Left Attack). On March 24 the west hillock was occupied by a strong picket of the Hyderabad Contingent with two 5½ inch mortars, which played on the mound and the adjoining buildings. On the east hillock an 8-inch howitzer and two 8-inch mortars were placed in battery, and opened fire on the rear of the mound and the south of the city. This battery was reinforced by two 24-pounder howitzers on March 25. The 2nd Brigade encamped at the rear of the east hillock. On March 25 the 1st Brigade arrived with its siege-train and encamped behind the west hillock, about two miles from the camp of the 2nd Brigade. Four batteries were now constructed on the west hillock; they were armed with three 18-pounder guns, two 10-inch mortars, and two 8-inch mortars.



### *Heroic Defence of Jhansi*

The garrison defended the bastion and the city wall so heroically as to merit high praise. The guns in the city and in the fort were well served and even the non-combatants showed considerable courage and enthusiasm in the defence of this important nationalist stronghold. Sir Hugh Rose was so much impressed by the determined resistance of the garrison that he could not help paying glowing tributes to them in his Despatch. "The manner in which the Rebels served their guns, repaired their defences, and reopened fire from batteries and guns repeatedly shut up, was remarkable. From some batteries they returned shot for shot."\* Great enthusiasm prevailed amongst the garrison — even women and children helped in repairing the defences of the walls, and in carrying ammunition to the batteries.

It was on March 28 that the British batteries opened an effective bombardment. The fire of the two 18-pounders

\* From Sir Hugh Rose to the Chief of the Staff — April 30, 1858

was so effective that towards sunset the parapets of the 'white turret', and 'black tower', and the 'tree tower', which faced the Left Attack, were nearly destroyed. The two 10-inch mortars created great havoc in the fort by exploding a powder-magazine. The 'wheel tower' battery and the 'garden battery', however, annoyed the Left Attack a good deal. To silence the former a new battery (No. 5 Left Attack) was established near the Jokum Bagh, where two 5½ inch mortars were already in action. These were replaced by two 8-inch mortars and a 9-pounder, which were further reinforced by a 24-pounder howitzer. The fire from the 9-pounder silenced the 'wheel tower' battery. The two 8-inch mortars and occasionally the two 10-inch mortars of the Left Attack answered the 'garden battery' whose fire could not be silenced. On the 'white turret' the Rani's troops had made an excellent parapet of large sand bags, which they kept always wet, and continued to serve new guns in lieu of disabled guns. By March 30 the situation became critical for the garrison as their best guns had been disabled and their best artillery-men had been killed or wounded. By that time the British artillery had asserted its supremacy. The breaching guns, which for two days had failed to create an impression on the hard masonry of the wall close to the mound, succeeded on the third day (March 30) in effecting a breach. The garrison was quite alive to the danger and showed considerable energy in retrenching the breach with a double row of palisades filled with earth. A considerable portion of this stockade was, however, destroyed by the concentrated fire of the British batteries. The fortunes of the garrison were at the lowest ebb for the British force was getting ready for the assault. The Rani was anxiously scanning the horizon for signs of Tatya Tope's approaching army. She passed many anxious hours and at last (March 31) when she had almost despaired of timely help a wild shout of joy went up from the garrison for Tatya Tope's army was advancing to the relief of Jhansi.

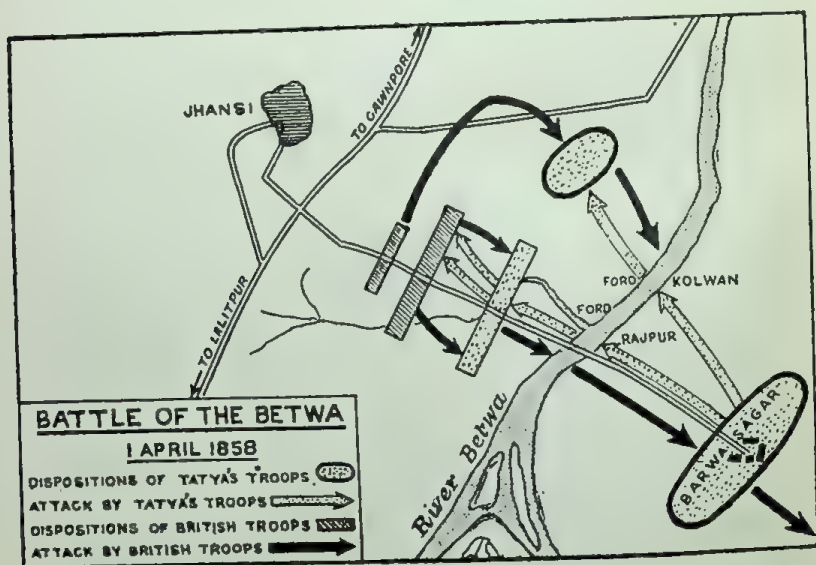


*To the Rescue*

Tatya Tope had captured Charkhari after a siege of eleven days and had secured twenty-four guns and three lakhs of rupees. Then with a force of 20,000 men and 30 guns he hurried to the relief of Jhansi. On March 30 he arrived at Barwa Sagar, about three miles from the Betwa. His plan was to make a surprise attack on the British force while it was engaged in battering the ramparts of the city of Jhansi. The plan miscarried because Sir Hugh Rose got timely information about the arrival of his force as he had established a telegraph upon one of the hills east of Jhansi. The situation facing Sir Hugh Rose was very critical. If the garrison of Jhansi made a sortie at the same time that Tatya Tope's force led the attack the small British force would be annihilated. The only way out of the difficulty was to keep some troops to carry on the siege and with the rest of the force to fall upon Tatya Tope's troops, and defeat them. Sir Hugh Rose's dispositions were swiftly made. Leaving the battery and some of the troops of the 1st Brigade to carry on the siege of Jhansi, Sir Hugh advanced with the rest of his force and drew it up across the road from the Betwa, half a mile from his camp. His first line consisted of the 2nd Brigade. In the centre were the 3rd Europeans, detachments of the 24th Bombay Native Infantry and the Hyderabad Infantry, supported by three heavy guns; on the right of the line were a troop of the 14th Light Dragoons and one of the Hyderabad Cavalry, supported by four guns Horse Artillery; and on the left flank were two troops of the 14th Light Dragoons, supported by a field battery. The second line consisted of the 1st Brigade, with a weak troop of the 14th Light Dragoons on the right, and the Hyderabad Cavalry on the left flank while in the centre was the 86th Regiment, with detachments of the 25th Bombay Native Infantry, supported by a battery of 6-pounders and a battery of 9-pounders. Cavalry pickets and lines of vedettes (of the 14th Light Dragoons and the Hyderabad Cavalry) were thrown out well to the front and the flanks.

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Facing the British force was a large part of Tatya Tope's force, which had crossed the upper ford at Rajpur in the evening on March 30. Tatya Tope's tactics were skilful. While a large part of his force was in position opposite the British force, he sent the rest of his force to cross the lower ford at Kolwan in order to turn the left of the British flank. But Sir Hugh Rose got timely intimation of this move and at midnight he ordered Brigadier Stuart with the 1st Brigade to march at once and check this movement. The departure of the 1st Brigade left Sir Hugh Rose without a second line. He was therefore obliged to withdraw the detachment of the 24th Native Infantry from the first line, and make a second line of them. Meanwhile Tatya Tope had made his dispositions. His force in the immediate front of Sir Hugh Rose was formed in two lines, the second (commanded by himself in person) three miles to the rear.



Throughout the night the 'watch-fires' lit up the countryside, thus indicating to the garrison of Jhansi that Tatya Tope's army had come to their help. Wild enthusiasm

prevailed amongst the Rani's troops. Throughout the night they kept up a brisk fire on the British positions. The British guns too sent their shot and shell into the city.

On April 1, 1858 was fought the battle of the Betwa. Day had scarcely dawned when the British vedettes and pickets began to fall back on the British force, and shortly afterwards, coming in grand array of battle was Tatya Tope's army bent on raising the siege of Jhansi. They brought up their long line of artillery, supported by masses of infantry, and six or seven hundred cavalry. Having advanced within 600 yards of the British line, they unlimbered and opened fire, which was very heavy. The British batteries now opened fire, and the infantry on both sides blazed away furiously. The engagement became general, and was kept up with great spirit on both sides. Musketry replied to musketry, and as their superior fire began to tell on the British close ranks around the heavy guns in the centre, the infantry were ordered to lie down. While keeping up pressure on the centre of the British line, Tatya Tope despatched part of his force to turn the left flank. Sir Hugh Rose realized the gravity of the situation. He decided to prevent Tatya Tope from outflanking his force. This could only be done by seizing the initiative of rolling up the enemy flanks, before Tatya Tope could carry out his flanking movement. He therefore ordered the artillery from both flanks of the line to advance, the guns of the Horse Artillery to the right so as to crush Tatya Tope's gunners by an enfilading fire. In this movement a round-shot broke the wheel of a Horse Artillery gun at which Tatya Tope's men wildly cheered. Sir Hugh Rose then ordered the Hyderabad Cavalry to charge the battery, which was working havoc. Thrice did the cavalry charge and thrice were they hurled back by showers of grape and volleys from the Velaitee matchlock-men. Tatya Tope's troops followed them up, and killed and wounded many men and horses, and also wounded their leader severely Sir Hugh Rose now resolved to bring the issue of the battle to a speedy

decision by cavalry charges on both the flanks. Placing himself at the head of a troop of Dragoons he dashed into the enemy's left, while two troops of Dragoons charged the enemy's right flank. The troop of Dragoons led by Sir Hugh Rose charged the enemy's left, which was composed of the best nationalist troops, the Velaitees and sepoys, who, throwing themselves back on the right and resting the flanks of their new line four or five deep on the rocky knolls, received the charge with a heavy fire of musketry. The Dragoons broke through the dense line, which flung itself among the rocks, and taking the front line in reverse routed it. The work done by the troop of Dragoons on this occasion "was equal to breaking a square of infantry." The charge "turned the enemy's position and decided in a great measure the fate of the day."\* The two troops of Dragoons charging into the enemy's right also succeeded in turning the enemy's position. The wild charge of the British cavalry rolled up the flanks and threw the whole of Tatya's first line into confusion, forcing them to fall back on the second line commanded by Tatya Tope in person. When the British cavalry came in hot pursuit they were checked by Tatya Tope's second line drawn up on some jingly ground.

Meanwhile Brigadier Stuart, with the 1st Brigade had encountered some 2,000 of Tatya Tope's troops entrenched in a village. The British artillery came into action at 600 yards range and bombarded the village; the infantry then advanced in skirmishing order, with their flanks protected by the cavalry. A bayonet charge drove out Tatya Tope's troops from the village but they rallied in another village in the rear. From this village also they were ejected. They then formed themselves in a compact body covered by a strong rear guard and retired toward the Rajpur ford.

Seeing his first line routed and his right flanking column driven back by Stuart, Tatya Tope, who commanded the

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\* From Sir Hugh Rose to A.G., Bombay Army — April 30, 1858



second line, resolved to discontinue the engagement and to extricate his force. He ordered the artillery to fire on the advancing British troops and thus kept them engaged for some time. In the meantime he fired the jungle behind him and under cover of this ingenious smoke-screen extricated a large part of his force. Tatyā Tope lost eighteen guns and about a thousand of his troops but he managed to save a very large part of his army. His mission of relieving Jhansi was, however, a failure. For this failure the Rani's troops were also partly responsible. They knew that Tatyā Tope's army had come to their rescue and the din of the battle must have informed them that it was locked in a life and death struggle with the British force. That was the time for them to sally forth and fall on the British force. But they were content to confine their activities to shouting and firing into the British batteries. A contemporary British writer condemned this inactivity severely: "Why the garrison did not, make a sortie, and destroy our batteries, while the Peshwa's army was attempting their rescue from without, it is impossible to imagine. Their overpowering numbers must have been successful, however well our infantry and gunners might have stood to their guns. They may have been deterred by a false attack made by Major Gall and Captain Field, R.A., on a distant part of the city wall."\* No less severe is their condemnation by Sir John Fortescue, who remarks that the garrison was overawed by a false attack delivered by Sir Hugh's orders and therefore did not dare to sally out against the besiegers during the day and also failed to attack the British troops at night when the latter must have been utterly exhausted by their exertions.† Their guns had been disabled, their best artillery-men had been wounded or killed and the city wall had been breached and therefore there was no prospect of holding out for long in the fort and in the city. The only recourse was to sally out and by a determined attack to crush

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\* Sylvester, pp. 101-102

† Fortescue, XIII, p. 359

the small British force, sandwiched as it was between two strong forces. That was the only way of winning a victory and escaping from the net that was fast closing round them. But though brave — for most of them fought valiantly in defence of Jhansi — they lacked the courage to seize the initiative to hurl themselves on the English batteries or Sir Hugh Rose's field force. A double attack — one directed by Tatya Tope and the other by the Rani — would have disconcerted the British force and led to its total defeat. A decisive victory would have enhanced the prestige of the nationalist leaders and rallied many of the waverers to their side. But the golden opportunity was not seized with boldness with the result that defeat stared them in the face.

Tatya Tope's strategy was excellent but the timely information gained by Sir Hugh Rose about his movements enabled the latter to dispose his forces in such a manner as to meet successfully the threatened attack. Tatya Tope followed sound tactics for while a part of his force engaged the British force led by Sir Hugh Rose, the rest of it was despatched to envelop the British left flank. The tactics would have succeeded had Tatya Tope not been called upon to deal with a very able general. Sir Hugh Rose proved too clever for him; he checkmated this move by sending Stuart with the 1st Brigade to carry out a wide flanking march so as to envelop Tatya Tope's force, which was trying to turn the left flank of the main British force. Thus it came about that when Tatya Tope's first line was driven back he realised that the game was up and so he decided to save his force, leaving the garrison of Jhansi to its fate. How well he succeeded in his task of bringing out safely his force from an untenable position is clear from the fact that in the battle of the Betwa his loss amounted to 18 guns and about a thousand casualties i.e. hardly a fraction of his army which numbered 20,000 men.

*A Saga of Heroism*

The defeat of Taty Tope's army sealed the fate of Jhansi. Early in the morning on April 3 Sir Hugh Rose assaulted Jhansi—two columns of stormers advanced from the west hillock towards the Rocket Tower (the southwestern bastion of the city) and the breach at the mound. Simultaneously two other columns advanced from the area of the east hillock to escalate the wall on the right and on the left of the Orchha gate. The columns for the right attack met determined opposition from the Rani's troops, who were aware of their approach and were manning the ramparts. They opened a murderous fire but the stormers rushed forward across a field and then down a road, which was swept by the well-directed fire from the ramparts. The sappers began to fall thick and fast while the fire from the guns of the fort and the city increased in volume and intensity. The sappers and the party heading the attack took advantage of the shelter of some ruins. Then they rushed forward, reached the walls, and planted the scaling-ladders "amid a hail of bullets, rockets, huge stones, and every possible description of missile."\* The ladders broke down. The British column was now at the mercy of the garrison but a Lieutenant of Engineers carried a powder bag with the help of a few sappers, and under a hail of bullets fixed it to a postern gate and fired it. Out flew the door in fragments. A rush was made into the cloud of smoke to get through the entrance but disappointment was in store for them for their way was barred by huge blocks of stone and masonry. Nothing remained now but to beat a hasty retreat.

While the Rani's troops were successful in checking the advance of the columns of the right attack they failed to thwart the attempts of the columns of the left attack to capture the mound (mamelon) and the Rocket Tower. The

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\* Sylvester, p. 103

stormers rushed forward and covered the few yards between them and the breach. Then they found a large trench of masonry at its foot. To jump into this trench and plant the ladders, was but the work of a moment, and up they went against stiffening resistance, gained the mound, and ran down the incline to the street leading to the palace. The street ran close under the fort walls. "The matchlock and musketry fire on the men at this point was perfectly hellish! The bullets fell so thickly in the dusty road, that they resembled the effect of hailstones falling in water when striking it and the men fell thick and fast here. One point of the street ran quite close to the gateway of the fort, and was not passed without severe loss."\* The British troops also successfully escalded the Rocket Tower and effected a junction with the other column. Meanwhile the two columns of the right attack had renewed their attack and driven the Rani's troops from the ramparts towards the palace. Bitter fighting took place in the streets. They were subjected to a deadly fire from the houses. The contest was furious; every inch of the ground was contested. They forced their way through stiff opposition and advanced towards the palace, where they effected a junction with the two columns of the left attack.

The palace was captured after a fierce struggle. About forty Velaitee Sowars, the body-guard of the Rani, however still held the palace stables. The Sowars defended vigorously the stables, "firing with matchlocks and pistols from the windows and loopholes, and cutting with their tulwars, and from behind the doors. When driven in they retreated behind their houses, still firing or fighting with their swords in both hands till they were shot or bayoneted struggling even when dying on the ground to strike again. A party of them remained in a room off the stables which was on fire till they were half burnt; their clothes in flames, they rushed out hacking at their assailants, and

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\* Sylvester, p. 105



guarding their heads with their shields."\* All the Sowars were killed though not before they had inflicted some casualties on their assailants. That too was not the end of the struggle. The street fighting, or rather house fighting, went on until nightfall.

Meanwhile four hundred of the Rani's troops had sallied out of the city and were proceeding to Tehri when they were attacked by a British picket and forced to take shelter on an isolated rocky hill to the west of the fort. The British picket received reinforcements, surrounded the rock and effectively shelled it. "Many preferred lying down on their powder-flasks, and blowing themselves up. Finally the Infantry went up and cleared it, killing the four-hundred who fought to the last."†

On the next day (April 4) the rest of the city was occupied after fierce fighting that raged in the streets. During the night, when it was pitch dark, the Rani, along with her step son, three hundred Afghans and twenty-five troops stole away from the fort. After leaving the fort they were headed back by one of the British pickets. To deceive the enemy the Rani and her party separated — she herself with a few sowars taking to the right in the direction of Bhandara, 21 miles from Jhansi. The British cavalry was hot in their pursuit. Lieutenant Dowker pressed on in advance of the cavalry and passing through Bhandara saw the Rani riding on her grey horse accompanied by four attendants. Lieutenant Dowker was fast gaining on the Rani when a shot was fired severely wounding him and obliging him to give up the pursuit.

Early in the morning of April 5 Sir Hugh Rose caused the outskirts of the city to be scoured with cavalry and infantry. Many fierce encounters took place. The Rani's troops, who were chiefly Velaitees (Afghans) sold their

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\* From Sir Hugh Rose to the Chief of the Staff—April 30, 1858

† Sylvester, p. 107

lives as dearly as they could, fighting to the last with their usual dexterity and firmness. One typical incident illustrates the heroism of these troops. Forty of them barricaded themselves in a spacious house with vaults and a courtyard. A detachment of the Hyderabad Infantry assaulted the house but suffered heavy casualties for the Afghans were good marksmen and every shot told. They could neither scale the wall nor break open the massive door. Fresh reinforcements, including several pieces of siege artillery were then brought up, but even when the house had been breached and knocked to pieces, the Afghans continued to resist in the ruined passages and vaults. They were all killed but not before they had inflicted casualties on the assailants. 5,000 people laid down their lives in the heroic defence of Jhansi.

### *Loss of Banda*

Shortly after the fall of Jhansi the nationalist force suffered another reverse. Leaving a small garrison in Jubulpore, Brigadier G. C. Whitlock set out on February 17 at the head of 1,900 men of the Saugor Field Force to defeat another powerful nationalist leader—the Nawab of Banda. After a skirmish at Kubrai on April 17, Whitlock found the Nawab of Banda's force in position about eight miles west of Banda. The Nawab's force consisted of seven thousand men, of whom about one-third were regular troops. It was a strong defensive position, which they had selected, for the ground was intersected by ravines and water-courses, which were favourable for defence. On April 19 Whitlock attacked the nationalist force. The battle raged furiously for seven hours but at last the Nawab's troops gave way. The Nawab escaped with a large part of his force to Kalpi.

### *Heroic Defence of Lucknow*

The loss of Jhansi was a severe blow to the nationalist cause. The loss of Lucknow was another serious set-back.

After defeating Tatya Tope's forces at the battle of Cawnpore on December 6, 1857, Sir Colin Campbell prepared for the winter campaign with the object of securing the command of the Cawnpore-Delhi road. His plan was to secure the strong fort of Fatehgarh, a place of great strategic importance, for it was situated at the junction of the Doab, Rohilkhand, and Oudh, and commanded a bridge-of-boats across the Ganges. Three movable columns were to converge on Fatehgarh—Brigadier Seaton was to sweep southwards from Delhi to Mainpuri, where he was to effect a junction with Brigadier Walpole's column advancing from Cawnpore *via* Akbarpur and Etawah. The combined columns were to advance on Fatehgarh, near which they were to be joined by Sir Colin's main force, which was to advance by the Grand Trunk Road, clearing the right bank of the Ganges *en route*. Seaton's column left Delhi on December 6 and after overcoming opposition at Gangari (December 15) and Patiali (December 18) effected a junction with Walpole's column on January 3, 1858. Meanwhile Sir Colin's force concentrated at Miran-ki-Sarai (December 30) and on January 2, forced a passage across the bridge over the Kali Nadi in face of heavy opposition. On the next day he occupied Fatehgarh — the nationalist troops and their leader the Nawab of Farrukhabad having escaped into Oudh. On January 6, the two columns led by Seaton and Walpole entered Fatehgarh, raising Sir Colin's force to more than 10,000 men. The concentration of such a large force at Fatehgarh had a secondary strategic purpose: it was intended to mislead the nationalist troops into the belief that the main blow would fall on Rohilkhand whereas it was intended that the main effort should be directed towards the capture of Lucknow. To carry out the feint attack towards Rohilkhand, Sir Colin directed Seaton to hold Fatehgarh and the Doab, and Walpole to make a demonstration against Rohilkhand, while he concentrated the main force in the plain between Unao and Bani in Oudh.

Meanwhile the nationalist troops were mustering for the defence of Lucknow, which they rightly believed would be

the main British objective. The nationalist force at Lucknow had increased to 120,000 men, of whom 27,550 were trained sepoys, and 7,100 trained cavalry, while the rest were new levies and armed followers of the Talukdars. There were about 4,000 gunners to operate the guns, which exclusive of those mounted on the walls, amounted to 131. The defences of the city were also considerably strengthened. There were three main lines of defence. The first was along the bank of the canal covering all the bridges. In the rear was the second defence line embracing the Moti Mahal, the Mess House, and the Little Imambara. The third covered the Kaisarbagh. In addition all the main streets were protected by bastions and barricades, and every building of importance was loopholed. The nationalist troops, led by able leaders, such as the Maulvi of Fyzabad, certainly showed considerable skill in organising the defence of Lucknow. Sir Colin paid high tribute to these leaders for their skill in preparing the defences. The buildings "formed a range of massive palaces and walled courts, of vast extent, equalled perhaps, but certainly not surpassed, in any capital in Europe. Every outlet had been covered by a work, and on every side were prepared barricades and loopholed parapets. The extraordinary industry evinced by the enemy in this respect has been really unexampled."\*

The nationalist leaders had protected the city on three sides but had neglected the northern side with the result that Sir Colin took advantage of this weakness in their defence. For the attack on Lucknow, Sir Colin had at his disposal more than 30,000 men and 164 guns. On March 2 the advance troops occupied the Dilkusha and the next three days were spent in completing the bridges on the Gumti. Sir Colin's plan was to make a strong attack on the south and to send a force across the Gumti to operate on the east and north. Thus Lucknow was to be captured

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\* From Sir Colin Campbell to Lord Canning — March 22, 1858



by a double thrust—the right attack from across the Gumti and the left attack from the south. On March 6 the British force, which was to attack from the right, was across the river and by the 9th occupied the left bank of the Gumti as far as Badshahbagh, thus taking the nationalist troops completely in reverse. On the same day the left attack developed. For two weeks the battle raged fiercely. The British forces stormed and captured Lucknow on March 23. The loss of Lucknow was a serious set-back to the nationalist cause but as more than 40,000 nationalist troops led by their leaders—the Begum ‘the ablest man of all’ and the Maulvi of Fyzabad, escaped into Oudh and Rohilkhand the struggle for the independence of the country was continued with unabated vigour.

### *Attack on Azamgarh*

Meanwhile Kunwar Singh had again become active in Bihar. On March 22, he defeated a British force and forced it to fall back on Azamgarh, which he besieged. Another British force advanced from Allahabad for the relief of Azamgarh. On April 6 this force was ambushed by Kunwar Singh's troops at a place about eight miles from Azamgarh. The British troops fought their way out with difficulty and effected a junction with the garrison of Azamgarh. Kunwar Singh, at the head of 13,000 troops, had a good opportunity of seizing Azamgarh. He failed to avail himself of this opportunity for he did not prosecute the siege vigorously. Meanwhile another strong British force left Lucknow on March 29 for the relief of Azamgarh. As this force approached Azamgarh, Kunwar Singh resolved “not to stake the issue of the campaign on a single battle.” He left some seasoned troops to act as a rear-guard while with his main force he pushed on to cross the Ganges and escape to Jagdishpur. The rear-guard offered stout resistance and held up the advance of the British force so that Kunwar Singh's force gained some twelve miles before they were overtaken. Then the nationalist troops gave a splendid example

of their discipline and courage. They fought successful rear-guard actions. By a masterly retreat Kunwar Singh led his force safely back to Jagdishpur. After receiving fresh reinforcements he fell upon a large party of British troops, which had been sent against him, and completely defeated them on April 23. The whole of Western Bihar was rallying to his side but his death soon afterwards robbed the nationalist force of a capable leader. The nationalist forces in Bihar however continued the guerilla warfare till the end of the year.

### *End of Resistance in Rajputana*

In Rajputana the nationalist forces were routed and the British authority was restored. In January 1858 reinforcements arrived in Rajputana from Bombay and the nationalist troops were speedily driven from Awah. Further reinforcements arrived in March. In that month Major-General H. G. Roberts arrived at Nasirabad and relieved Brigadier Lawrence in the military command. The force under his command was known as the Rajputana Field Force. The infantry comprised three British regiments and three Bombay native regiments. The cavalry consisted of a British regiment, two regular and two irregular Bombay regiments. The force was supported by artillery, including the siege-train. After laying siege to Kotah for a week (March 24 to March 30) Roberts captured this important nationalist stronghold in Rajputana. That was practically the end of the nationalist resistance in Rajputana.

## Chapter IX

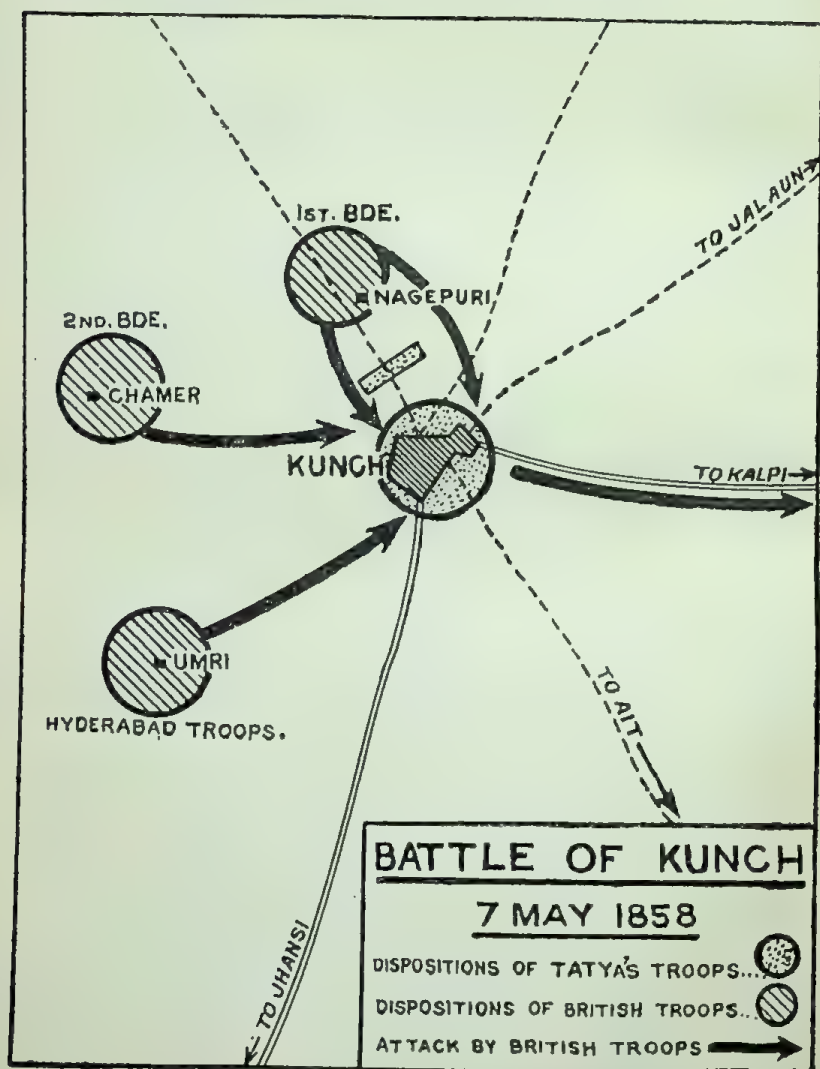
### A DARING COUNTER-STROKE

#### *Defensive Position at Kunch*

AFTER the loss of Jhansi, Tatya Tope and the Rani of Jhansi escaped to Kalpi, where they helped Rao Sahib in reorganising his forces. In order to check the British advance on Kalpi, Tatya Tope marched at the head of a large force to Kunch (on the Jhansi road 42 miles from Kalpi) and there entrenched himself in a strong position. Though Kunch was an open town it was difficult to attack because it was surrounded by woods, gardens and temples with high walls round them, which were suitable for defence. Tatya Tope also threw up entrenchments to defend the road to the town from Jhansi. He was ably assisted by the Rani of Jhansi in improving the defences of Kunch.

Sir Hugh Rose realised that it would be futile to make a frontal attack on the strong position. He preferred to turn the right flank of Tatya Tope's force. Therefore he made a flanking march with his whole force to the north-west so as to deploy his troops in this manner — on the left flank was the 1st Brigade, resting its left flank on the village of Nagepuri; in the centre was the 2nd Brigade in the village of chamer; on the right flank were the Hyderabad troops under Major Orr, in front of the village of Umri. The deployment of the force in this manner had the double advantage of threatening seriously Tatya Tope's line of retreat from Kunch to Kalpi, and exposing to attack the north-west of the town, which was not protected by entrenchments. Sir Hugh Rose's force was in position at 7 A.M. on May 7. He ordered that a triple attack should be made and all the three columns should advance against

the town and force an entry into it. The main attack, however, was to be made by the 1st Brigade, led by Sir Hugh Rose in person, to turn the flank and thus disconcert the nationalist troops, who dreaded nothing more than a turning movement. It was in fact the 1st Brigade, which played the leading role in the capture of Kunch.





When the 1st Brigade was in position, with its left flank on the village of Nagepuri, Tatya Tope's cavalry established strong pickets outside the wood. A few rounds of shrapnel from the British guns, however, sufficed to disperse them, thus unmasking masses of infantry, which had taken position behind a long wall in front of the 1st Brigade and in the wood to the left of it. The two-18-pounders and 8-inch howitzers battered the wall while the half troop of Horse Artillery advanced and shelled the infantry to the left of the wall. Tatya Tope's battery poured in shot and shell to silence the British guns. After a short but sharp artillery duel the British guns succeeded in silencing Tatya Tope's battery. After these preliminary operations, Sir Hugh Rose determined to drive Tatya Tope's troops out of the wood, gardens, and temples, which surrounded Kunch, and then to storm the town, including a dilapidated mud fort on a rising ground, a strong position, which was opposite to the right of the 1st Brigade. The first line, which was to launch the attack, consisted of a wing of the 86th Regiment on the left, and the 25th Bombay Native Infantry on the right, with their flanks supported by three troops of cavalry (14th Light Dragoons), the half troop Horse Artillery and Captain Ommaney's Battery. The second line in reserve consisted of a wing of the 86th Regiment, one troop 14th Light Dragoons and Captain Woolcombe's Battery. The first line advanced to the attack in skirmishing order. The skirmishers of the 25th Bombay Native Infantry charged into the wood, temples and walled gardens, and occupied them under a fire of musketry and artillery from one of Tatya Tope's batteries on the right. The British guns, however, silenced the battery, and effectively cannonaded the houses in the streets of Kunch in their front, thus enabling the skirmishers to occupy them. Meanwhile the wing of the 86th Regiment, supported by three Horse Artillery guns and a troop of 14th Light Dragoons, made a circuit to the left, took all the obstacles in their front, and advancing, despite artillery and musketry fire through the whole northern part of the town, took the fort. Tatya Tope, however, tried to launch a

counter-attack; his infantry in large numbers posted in cultivated ground, threatened the right of the line of attack of the 1st Brigade. Sir Hugh Rose sent a small cavalry force (a troop of the 3rd Regiment Hyderabad Cavalry and two troops 14th Light Dragoons), supported by a field battery to dislodge them. Tatya Tope's troops held the position obstinately, and it was not until a portion of the infantry of the 2nd Brigade moved down on them from another direction, that they retreated. After their right flank was turned Tatya Tope's troops pulled out of Kunch.

The 2nd Brigade formed up in line opposite a small village, but with the exception of one advance in skirmishing order made by the 71st Highlanders, did little "but remain grilling under the enemy's fire throughout the greater part of the day."\* On the right flank Major Orr sent his infantry to storm the wall and gardens in his front. They succeeded in driving Tatya Tope's troops from these places but a sharp counter-attack drove them back pell-mell to their original position. Tatya Tope's troops grew bolder and opened a heavy fire on the guns supporting the Hyderabad troops, pitching their shrapnel into the very midst of them. Thus neither the 2nd Brigade nor Major Orr's Hyderabad troops could force their entry into the town. It was only when the 1st Brigade secured the fort and turned the right flank of Tatya Tope's force that they fell upon his troops, who were pulling out of Kunch.

### *Tatya Tope's Masterly Retreat*

Tatya Tope's genius lay not in fighting pitched battles but in extricating his forces after they had been beaten. Never was his skill more in evidence than in the masterly retreat to Kalpi. The British infantry being too exhausted the pursuit was taken up by the cavalry of the two

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\* Sylvester, p. 130

brigades and Major Orr's force, supported by Horse Artillery and light field guns. But Tatya Tope's troops commenced the retreat across the plain with resolution and intelligence. Sir Hugh Rose was so much impressed that he wrote in his Despatch: "The line of skirmishers fought well to protect the retreat of the main body, observing the rules of Light Infantry Drill. When charged, they threw aside their muskets, and fought desperately with their swords."\* A contemporary writer also bestowed high praise on the tenacity with which Tatya Tope's rear-guards conducted the retreat. "Each of the rebels was provided with a Government musket, belt and cartouch box, in capital order, and well provided with cartridges. After firing, down went the musket and out came the sharp-cutting native sword: they evidently could not use the bayonet. They cut and slashed our horses and men so long as one of their band remained alive."† It was only when many of their skirmishers had been killed and their guns captured that demoralisation set in. Then Tatya Tope's troops crowded into the Kalpi road, "a long and helpless column of runaways." But by that time the pursuers were also too exhausted to press on the pursuit. The sun, fatigue and scarcity of water told on Tatya Tope's troops as well as on the pursuers. Sir Hugh Rose in his Despatch gives a vivid description of the harassing nature of the pursuit. "The Horse Artillery and Cavalry were now so beaten by sun and fatigue, that they were reduced to a walk; the guns were only able to rake the Column in its depth with round shot and shell, but could not approach sufficiently close to give it grape. The Cavalry on their part had only strength to reach the numerous stragglers, who could not keep up with the Enemy's main body. On reaching some wood and broken ground about a village, seven or eight miles from Koonch, profiting by

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\* From Sir Hugh Rose to Major-General Sir William Mansfield —  
May 24, 1858

† Sylvester, p. 132

this cover, they sought safety from attack by breaking into scattered flight across the country.

The scorching rays of the sun and the pace at which they retreated, told even on the sepoys; several fell dead on the road, struck by apoplexy; many exhausted, threw away their arms, whilst others, to quench their thirst rushed to the wells, regardless if our cavalry were upon them.”\*

The battle of Kunch and the pursuit lasted from day-break till 9 P.M. in a heat which was 110 degrees in the shade. The British casualties were 9 killed and 47 wounded. There were also 45 fatal cases of sunstroke. Tatya Tope lost nine guns and about 600 men in the action and pursuit. The 52nd Bengal Native Infantry Regiment, which covered the retreat, was nearly destroyed.

### *The Strong Kalpi Defences*

After the defeat at Kunch, Tatya Tope went to the village of Chirki, four miles from Jalaun, where his parents lived. From here he slipped away in disguise to Gwalior to make an effort to win over Sindhia's army of 10,000 men to his side. So he undertook the important task of establishing the Nana's authority at Gwalior, leaving Rao Sahib, the Nana's nephew, to defend Kalpi as best as he could. Rao Sahib received timely reinforcements for the Nawab of Banda came to Kalpi with a large force consisting of 2,000 cavalry, some guns and infantry. Rao Sahib's army was composed of the Gwalior Contingent, “the finest men, best drilled and organised, Native Troops of all arms in India”; sepoys of some of the Bengal Infantry Regiments; cavalry from Kotah; a chosen band of Velaitees; and the Nawab of Banda's force, comprising some regiments of the Bengal Cavalry, of which the 5th Irregulars, dressed in their red uniforms, formed a part. This large and efficient army was led

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\* From Sir Hugh Rose to Major-General Sir William Mansfield —  
May 24, 1858



by three leaders of considerable influence. Rao Sahib, the Nawab of Banda, and the Rani of Jhansi. "The high descent of the Rani, her unbounded liberality to her troops and retainers, and her fortitude which no reverses could shake rendered her an influential and dangerous adversary."\* The troops, ably led by such influential leaders, "fought their best because they were defending Kalpi, their best fortified stronghold in Central and Western India and only Arsenal full of warlike stores and ammunition."†

Though the fort of Kalpi "was wretched as a fortification," its position was unusually strong. It was protected on all sides by ravines; to its front by five lines of defence, and to its rear by the Jumna, from which rose the precipitous rock on which it stood. The leaders showed great skill in improving the natural defences of Kalpi. They prepared five lines of defence to protect the fort. The first line consisted of entrenchments and deep trenches across the road from Kunch to Kalpi, which were serious obstacles, because the ravines on each side of the road rendered it very difficult to turn them. The second line consisted of eighty-four temples of solid masonry, about two or three miles from Kalpi. The outwork of ravines formed the third line; the town of Kalpi the fourth; another chain of ravines between the town and the fort the fifth line of defence.

### *The Battle of Kalpi*

On May 9, Sir Hugh Rose moved off from Kunch, followed later by the 2nd Brigade. He avoided the elaborate fortifications along the direct road leading from Kunch to Kalpi, took a circuitous route and advanced to Golauli, on the right bank of the Jumna, six miles from Kalpi. By this clever move Sir Hugh Rose avoided the direct road and outflanked the strong defences. The nationalist troops were outwitted

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\* From Sir Hugh Rose to Sir William Mansfield — June 22, 1858

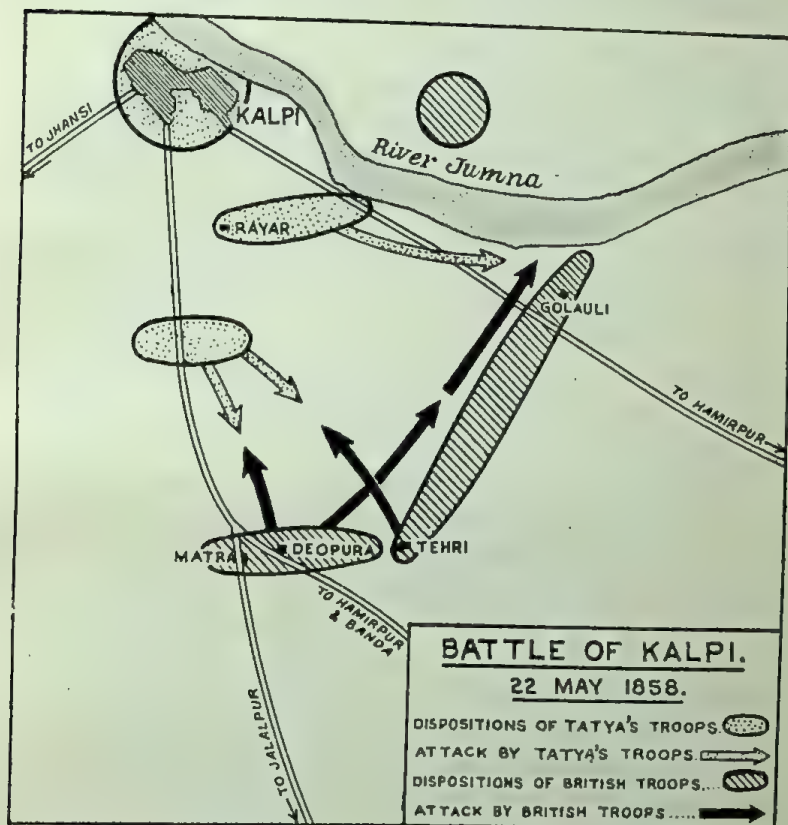
† Ibid

and outflanked for the great defences, which they had erected on the main road, were turned and rendered useless.

On May 15 the 1st Brigade encamped at Golauli. On the next day the advance guard and the centre of the 2nd Brigade reached the village of Deopura but the rear-guard was attacked by about 1,200 horsemen and a large body of infantry. This attack was repulsed and the rear-guard reached the camp at Deopura safely. But the nationalist troops, after being considerably reinforced, drove out the British troops occupying the village of Matra. The loss of this village would have rendered the camp untenable. Timely help however saved the situation from worsening. On hearing of the attack on the rear-guard Sir Hugh Rose had detached a small force from the 1st Brigade and had hurried to the rescue. He reached just in time to launch a counter-attack to recapture this vital position. The accurate fire of shrapnel and round shot from the British guns dispersed the cavalry but the infantry continued to hold the deep and twisting ravines in front of Matra. The shrapnel from the British guns bursting over their heads in the ravines, coupled with the fire of the 71st Regiment, at last compelled them to retire from their ambuscades. Thus by his timely intervention Sir Hugh Rose saved the situation from deteriorating.

Meanwhile taking advantage of the depleted strength of the 1st Brigade the nationalist troops attacked the British position at Golauli. They reinforced strongly their lines of outposts in the ravines, and supporting them with guns, and masses of infantry, at a distance, menaced and kept up a heavy fire on the British position at Golauli, from the Jumna to the village of Tehri. While pressure was maintained against the British troops in Golauli, a large number of skirmishers advanced to attack and capture the village of Tehri. Both these vigorous attacks — the one directed against Golauli and the other against Tehri, were repulsed. Shortly after this, as it appeared that the nationalist troops

were fortifying a high ridge, about half way between Golauli and Kalpi, Sir Hugh Rose ordered a battery of two 8-inch mortars to be constructed on a hillock in front of his right flank to shell the ridge and the ravines near it. This hillock, on which the mortar battery was constructed, was not only the key of the right wing but also of the whole British position.



The nationalist troops again attacked the 2nd Brigade on May 17 but met with a reverse. On the same day a small force (under the command of Colonel Maxwell) consisting of the 88th Foot, some Sikhs and the Camel Corps, arrived on the left bank of the Jumna opposite Golauli to co-

operate with Sir Hugh Rose in the attack on Kalpi. Maxwell was ordered to construct mortar batteries on the left bank of the Jumna in order to shell the fort and town of Kalpi, as well as the forward position at the village of Tehri. The nationalist troops continued however their tactics of harassing the British troops. Their pressure against the 2nd Brigade increased so much that Sir Hugh Rose decided on May 19 to concentrate these troops at Golauli.

On May 20 the nationalist troops advanced, covered by a very thick chain of skirmishers, through the ravines and made a determined attack on the right flank. The British pickets were reinforced and the attack was repulsed. That night Maxwell sent reinforcements, consisting of two companies of the 88th Regiment, the Camel Corps and two companies of Sikh Infantry. On the next day Maxwell erected his mortar batteries opposite the village of Tehri and the town of Kalpi.

On May 22 the nationalist troops launched a vigorous attack to decide the issue of the battle. Sir Hugh Rose, in anticipation of this attack, disposed his forces in two wings, the right, under Brigadier Stuart, and the left, under his own immediate command. The British force occupied the ground between the road from Kalpi to Banda and the Jumna; Stuart's front extended from the river at Golauli to a point nearly opposite to Tehri. The nationalist leaders followed admirable tactics. Their plan was ably conceived and vigorously executed. The plan was to make a serious feint attack on the British left so as to draw out the detachments from the British right, and then attack the weakened right with their main body and overwhelm it by sheer weight of numbers. The plan miscarried because Sir Hugh Rose had that rare gift of divining what 'the man on the other side of the hill' intends to do. The nationalist troops knew that the Europeans were utterly exhausted when exposed to the sun's rays; therefore they invariably arranged the fighting to take place at the hottest time of the day.



It was at 10 o'clock that large masses of infantry, supported by cavalry, advanced along the Banda road, and threatened the British left; simultaneously their guns poured out shot and shell on the British centre. This thrust was intended to be a demonstration but such was the momentum of the attack that the British left wavered. Sir Hugh Rose however refused to play into the hands of the enemy by withdrawing troops from the right in support of the threatened left. He was sure that the main attack would develop on the right for the stillness in the deep ravines was ominous. He ordered a company of the 3rd Europeans to be pushed some hundred yards in front of the outposts on the right flank "into this network of ambushes." The ruse succeeded. As Sir Hugh Rose points out in his Despatch: "The 3rd Europeans, after advancing some distance, found the Rebel host crouched in their lair, and started them from it. In an instant, a serious and general engagement began along the whole line from the Jumna to the village of Tehri; the belt of ravines in front of my position, becoming enveloped in smoke and fire, the sepoys rose out of their hiding places in thick chain of skirmishers, advancing and firing heavily, followed by large supports and columns *en masse* at a distance."\* The nationalist troops made a vigorous attack on the whole of the British right. Their pressure became almost irresistible. Like a huge tide, which sweeps all opposition before it, the nationalist troops advanced, directing their main attack on the mortar battery on the hillock, the key position. They drove back the British troops pell-mell and approached the light field-guns and mortar battery. It was the crisis of the battle. The lines of defence had been driven in and only a few artillery-men and the Brigadier stood by the guns to defend them. A few moments more and the position would have been won. But at this critical moment, Sir Hugh Rose,

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\* Ibid

who had withdrawn the Camel Corps from the left flank, charged into the dense masses of the nationalist troops. This attack from an unexpected quarter disconcerted the nationalist troops, who "wavered, turned and fled, pursued by the Camel Corps, with all their energy, through the ravines, where numbers of them were bayoneted or killed by musketry fire."\* That was the end of the nationalist struggle, for when the attack on the right flank was repulsed, the attack on the left flank also collapsed. The majority of the nationalist troops fled to Kalpi and during the night made good their escape.

### *A Bold Counter-Stroke*

The capture of Kalpi was the crowning achievement of the Central India Field Force. On June 1 Sir Hugh Rose issued a General Order congratulating the troops on their splendid achievements "of having marched more than a thousand miles, and taken more than a hundred guns." The General Order was still circulating in the British camp when startling news came of Tatyā Tope's bold counter-stroke. It was hardly believable yet nevertheless true—Sindhia's army had gone over to the side of Tatyā Tope, who had seized Gwalior. Tatyā Tope's daring initiative and bold counter-stroke yielded rich results. He was now master of the fort of Gwalior, considered to be one of the strongest, if not the strongest, fortress in India. 50 to 60 guns, comprising Horse, Field and Siege Artillery, as well as an arsenal with abundance of warlike stores, came into his possession. Sindhia's troops, about 10,000 men who went over to the side of Tatyā Tope, were the best organised and drilled of all the Native Levies. Sindhia's treasury and jewels, the latter said to be of fabulous value also fell into the hands of Tatyā Tope. Thus the seizure of Gwalior considerably strengthened his position.

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\* Ibid

The events which led to Tatya Tope's seizure of Gwalior were dramatic indeed. While Rao Sahib, the Rani of Jhansi and the Nawab of Banda were organising the defence of Kalpi, Tatya Tope slipped away in disguise to Gwalior and succeeded in winning over to his side Sindhia's army. When he heard that Kalpi had fallen and that Rao Sahib and the Rani of Jhansi were coming with the remnants of their force towards Gwalior, he left Gwalior on May 26 to apprise them of the situation. On May 31 their force was encamped at Burragaon, about eight miles from Gwalior. Sindhia marched against them at the head of his army but to his utter surprise he found that with the exception of his bodyguard his entire army deserted him and went over to the side of Tatya Tope. At this fiasco, Sindhia and his Dewan Dinkar Rao fled to Agra. On June 1 Rao Sahib, the Rani of Jhansi and Tatya Tope entered Gwalior in triumph and proclaimed the Nana as the Peshwa.

### *Sir Hugh Rose's Plans*

Sir Hugh Rose was thunder-struck at Tatya Tope's audacious plan, daring initiative and bold counter-stroke. He realised fully the gravity of the situation. If Tatya Tope left a part of his army at Gwalior and marched with the rest to the south to unfurl the standard of the Peshwa in the Deccan and southern Maratha country, thousands of Marathas would flock to it and thus strengthen considerably his power. The inhabitants of Indore too would rally to the side of the Peshwa. Sir Hugh Rose at once took steps to meet this serious threat. He ordered Major Orr, commanding the Hyderabad Contingent, to move from Jhansi to Pune, on the road from Gwalior to Sipri. Though Major Orr's force was too weak to attack Gwalior from that quarter it could cut off the retreat of Tatya Tope's troops to the south. Sir Hugh Rose directed Brigadier Smith, with the Rajputana Field Force, to move from Sipri to Kotah-ki-Sarai, about seven miles to the

south-east of Gwalior. Colonel Riddell was to move with his column and siege-train from Agra to a point seven miles north of Gwalior to invest the city on the west. Sir Hugh Rose himself proposed to march on Morar. He hoped that by June 19 the troops would be in position to carry out the investment of Gwalior and to enable an attack to be launched on the city from the hills lying south and south-east. Riddell however was delayed at Dholpur by the floods in the Chambal and could not carry out the task allotted to him.

### *Battle of Morar*

Leaving some troops to garrison Kalpi, Sir Hugh Rose set out on June 6 with a small force to overtake Stuart's column, which had started for Gwalior on June 1. By forced marches at night Sir Hugh Rose overtook Stuart at Indoorkee on June 12 and at 6 A.M. on the next day reached Bahadurpur, about five miles east of the Morar cantonment. The cantonment was five miles from Gwalior and was held in strength by Tatya Tope's troops. It lay on the right bank of the Morar river and was traversed by the road to Gwalior. The country between the cantonment and Bahadurpur was open and level, except that a number of nullas crossed its east front, while the country on the south-east was broken and hilly. Tatya Tope's cavalry was holding the cantonment, and the infantry was in position in its front and also lay concealed in the nullas and the broken and hilly country. A battery of guns, well-camouflaged, was in the centre. There was another battery on the right flank.

Sir Hugh Rose determined to capture Morar without loss of time. He pushed on and deployed his troops for the attack. He formed his force in two lines. The first line under the General himself was arranged as follows: the siege-guns and a light field-battery were in the centre; the 86th Regiment on their right; the 25th Bombay Native



Infantry on their left; detachments of the 14th Light Dragoons on the flanks. The second line, under the command of Brigadier-General Napier was disposed as follows: a light field-battery supported by the Hyderabad Horse on the right; some Madras Sappers and Miners and a wing of the 71st Highland Light Infantry in the centre; a wing of the 14th Light Dragoons on the left. Sir Hugh Rose's plan was to mask the dangerous ground to his left towards which the enemy evidently wished to draw him; to out-flank the enemy's left, double it up, and cut off their retreat from the road over the bridge to the rear of the cantonment leading to Gwalior. While the first line was to turn the enemy's left the second line was to be directed to his right, entrenched in the hilly country and the ravines.

The first line advanced to the attack but misled by the guide found itself under heavy fire from the central battery as well as the battery on the right. The British troops suffered casualties but the siege-guns, as well as the light field-guns of the second line, succeeded in silencing these batteries. Meanwhile the 86th Regiment on the right advanced in skirmishing order to turn the enemy's left. Perceiving this movement Tatya Tope's troops withdrew their batteries and retired over the bridge. The 86th Regiment occupied the cantonment. Meanwhile the second line was hotly engaged by infantry concealed in the nullas on the enemy's right. As the British troops approached the advanced nulla, Tatya Tope's troops opened on them a very heavy fire. The skirmishers of the 71st Highland Light Infantry succeeded in dislodging them from these ambuscades. They however suffered heavy casualties for every inch of the ground was fiercely contested. After two hours' fighting Sir Hugh Rose captured Morar. The capture of this strategic place gave Sir Hugh Rose the command of the line of the Morar river, of the road to Agra, enabling him at the same time to communicate with Dholpur on the right, and Kotah-ki-Sarai on the left.

*Action at Kotah-ki-Sarai*

Sir Hugh Rose's success at Morar was followed by Brigadier Smith's success at Kotah-ki-Sarai, about seven miles to the south-east of Gwalior. Smith reached Kotah-ki-Sarai in the morning on June 17. His force consisted of two cavalry regiments (the 8th Hussars and the 1st Bombay Lancers) and two infantry regiments (the 95th Foot and the 10th Bombay Native Infantry) supported by a troop of the Bombay Horse Artillery. Smith however found that Tatyá Tope's troops were holding the ridge and the range of hills in front. The terrain favoured Tatyá Tope's troops in checking the advance of the British force to Gwalior. North of Kotah-ki-Sarai the road to Gwalior crossed the river Morar by a ford and then ran alongside a canal through a deep defile in the hills for about two miles, after which it crossed the open plain about the Phul Bagh. Tatyá Tope's troops had taken up position on the hills east of the canal, thus commanding the road. They had also erected a battery on a ridge about 1,500 yards north of Kotah-ki-Sarai, thus commanding the British camp. Smith therefore took immediate steps to remove this threat. The Horse Artillery, supported by the cavalry, advanced towards the ridge, unlimbered and opened fire. After a short but sharp artillery duel Tatyá Tope's troops retired with their guns and took up a new position a thousand yards in its rear. Here they made a bold stand. The 95th Foot advanced in skirmishing order to clear this new position, as well as the surrounding hills, which commanded the road. At the same time Smith had his cavalry and guns through the defile. Shortly afterwards the 8th Hussars swept across the plain towards Phul Bagh. Such was the impetuosity of the charge that the Rani's troops in Phul Bagh could not make any resistance. Many of them were cut to pieces. Then the Hussars retired in haste from Phul Bagh for Tatyá Tope's troops were coming out of the Lashkar (the new city) in large numbers. Smith also withdrew his cavalry

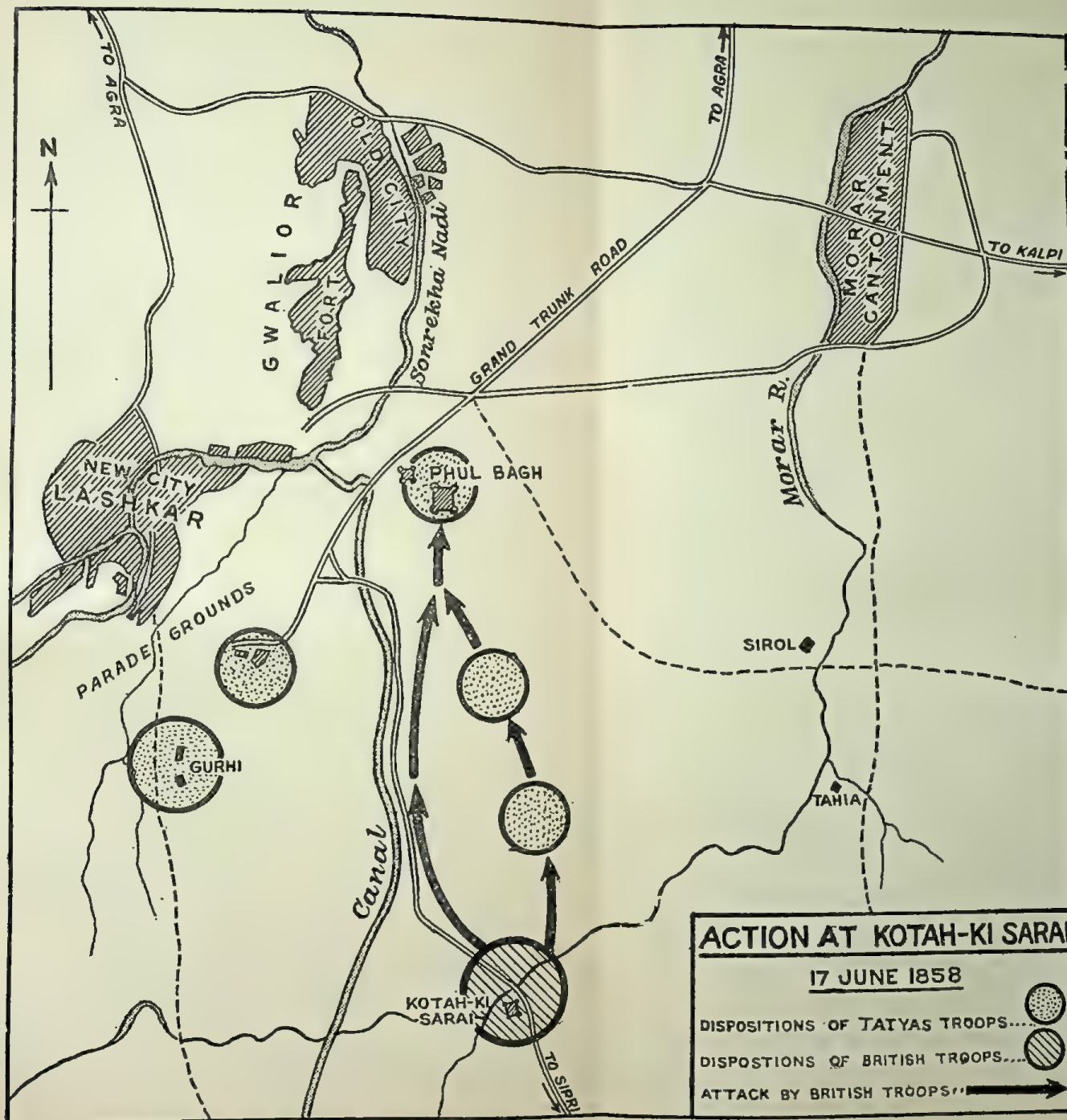


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# TATYA TOPE





from the defile, whose both ends he protected by posting infantry at suitable positions.

### *The Death of the Rani of Jhansi*

The action at Kotah-ki-Sarai disheartened Tatya Tope's troops considerably, not only because the British force had secured the defile and the hills on the right of the canal, but also because it had resulted in the death of their capable leader, the Rani of Jhansi. When the 8th Hussars attacked Phul Bagh the Rani clad in the attire of a man and mounted on horseback boldly rallied her followers to stem the British advance. But they were swept away before the impetuosity of the charge. The Rani's horse refused to leap the canal near the cantonment and she was cut down by a Hussar. Thus died the Rani in a blaze of glory, consecrating with her blood the cause she espoused.

### *The Battle of Gwalior*

Meanwhile Sir Hugh Rose at Morar was busy making plans for the capture of Gwalior. On the basis of reconnaissance reports he calculated that it would not be feasible to launch an attack on Gwalior from Morar for the British force would have had to cross the plain between Morar and Gwalior, under the fire of the fort, and of masked and formidable batteries, established in strong houses and gardens on the banks of the old canal and a dry river in front of the Phul Bagh palace. So on June 18, leaving a small force under Brigadier-General Napier at Morar, he marched with the rest of his force to Kotah-ki-Sarai, at a distance of twenty miles, and bivouacked opposite Kotah-ki-Sarai on the left bank of the Morar. He found that although Brigadier Smith had secured the defile and the hills to the east of the canal, Tatya Tope's troops still retained possession of the hills to the left of the defile and the canal. To the left of the road and canal rose from a narrow plain a succession of slopes, intersected by ravines; a ridge ran along the top of the slopes, on which Tatya Tope's

troops had placed a battery of 9-pounders. Infantry in large numbers were in position on the ridge to protect the battery and the entrenched position. In the rear of this position was a large body of cavalry. About a mile and a half further back, and about the same distance from the left of the road, was stationed, in a gorge of the hills, a large body of the infantry, with guns. They guarded a road which branched off from the ford southwards through the hills to Gwalior. Brigadier Smith's position in the hills to the east of the defile was weak and cramped. His left and rear were threatened by Tatya Tope's troops stationed on the ridge and in the gorge of the hills. The camp baggage and guns were in the pass (defile), into which came shots from Tatya Tope's battery on the ridge.

Sir Hugh Rose directed the company of Madras Sappers and Miners to make a bridge over the canal. During the night of June 18 Sir Hugh Rose ordered two 18-pounder guns and an 8-inch howitzer to be moved up a steep hill above the bivouac to neutralise the fire of the battery on the ridge. But the heavy guns failed to make any impression on the entrenchment. Tatya Tope's troops grew bolder and prepared to launch an attack to drive out the British troops from the defile and the hills to the east of the canal. Instead of tamely waiting to be attacked Sir Hugh Rose took the bold step of assuming the offensive. His plan was quickly made. Four infantry regiments (the 86th Foot, the 95th Foot, the 25th Bombay Native Infantry and the 10th Bombay Native Infantry) were to launch attacks on the ridge and the gorge and drive out Tatya Tope's troops. 4/2 Bombay Artillery was to support the infantry. A troop of the Bombay Horse Artillery and a squadron of the 8th Hussars were to occupy the northern end of the defile.

The infantry attack was successful. The 86th Foot crossed the canal, ascended steadily the heights and turned the right flank of Tatya Tope's force. Tatya Tope's troops retired rapidly and rallied round the battery. The skir-



mishers of the 86th Foot however pressed them so hard that they retreated to the entrenchment, in the rear of which they took up position. The British skirmishers pressed the attack and captured the entrenchment, as well as the three excellent English 9-pounders, which had defended the ridge. Tatyá Tope's troops fled towards Gwalior and to the hills to the south. The 95th Foot coming up on the right to the entrenchment turned the captured guns on Tatyá Tope's cavalry and infantry in the plain below at a distance of 1,000 yards. Tatyá Tope's four batteries in front of Gwalior now opened a hot fire of shot and shell on the British advance lines. On the right flank the 10th Bombay Native Infantry crossed the canal but were subjected to a galling musketry and artillery fire from the heights on the enemy's extreme left. Advancing in skirmishing order they cleared the two nearest heights and captured two brass field-pieces and three mortars.

The British troops were now in possession of the highest range of heights on the south and had a good view of Gwalior. To the right were the splendid Phul Bagh palace and the old city, surmounted by the fort, while to the left was the Lashkar or new city, with its spacious houses half hidden by trees. Tatyá's troops were holding positions extending from the Phul Bagh to the Lashkar. They were supported by guns including two 18-pounders. The shrapnel from an English 9-pounder burst just over the 18-pounders into about twenty pieces, killed and disabled some of the gunners, and put the rest to flight. Tatyá Tope knew that it would be difficult to defend Gwalior as the British troops occupying the heights commanded the plain below. Therefore his troops pulled out of Gwalior. The rear-guards however offered resistance, so that the main body might safely pull out of Gwalior. Thus on June 19 Gwalior fell into the hands of the British troops. On the next day the fort was captured after some resistance. On June 21 Napier overtook and defeated Tatyá Tope at Jora Alipore. Tatyá Tope lost twenty-five guns. Thus

exactly twenty-one days after Tatyā Tope and Rao Sahib had seized Gwalior their plan of turning Sindhia's territories into a nationalist stronghold was frustrated.

### *Struggle in Rohilkhand*

The loss of Gwalior was a serious set-back to the nationalist cause. Meanwhile the nationalist forces in Rohilkhand had also suffered defeat. In Rohilkhand the nationalists had tried to stem the tide of the British advance. Two incidents stand out prominently—the heroic defence of Bareilly and the counter-attack at Shahjahanpur. On May 5 was fought the battle of Bareilly in which the Rohilla Ghazis distinguished themselves by their stubborn valour. With dashing élan they swept the Sikhs before them and then hurled themselves on the bayonets of the 42nd Highlanders. All of them perished but not before they had killed or wounded several British troops. Some of the Rohillas sweeping past the 42nd Highlanders had attacked the baggage in the rear, but had been mown down by musketry fire.

While the British force was moving towards Bareilly to attack this important town of Rohilkhand, the Maulvi of Fyzabad made a dash towards Shahjahanpur and drove the small British force from the city into the jail enclosure. The Maulvi occupied the city. A strong British force advanced from Bareilly and on May 11 effected a junction with the British force in the jail enclosure. The Maulvi also received reinforcements. The nationalist leaders—the Begum of Oudh, Prince Feroze Shah and the Nana's representatives—were all assembled there to try a fling at fortune. Thus reinforced the Maulvi attacked the British force on May 15 but failed to gain any advantage. Alarmed at the deteriorating situation Sir Colin Campbell marched at the head of a large force and effected a junction with the British force at Shahjahanpur. The British forces took up a strong defensive position. The Maulvi's troops launched an attack on this position but

failed to capture it. They however fought valiantly and although in the end they gave way the British troops did not dare to pursue them. They escaped to Oudh to carry on the war to the bitter end. Shortly after the failure of the attack on Shahjahanpur the Maulvi met his death. He was shot dead by the followers of a petty raja, whose fort he was attempting to storm. The death of Maulvi Ahmed Allah of Fyzabad was indeed a serious blow to the nationalist cause for he was not only an ardent patriot but also a skilful general.

## Chapter X

### A MARATHON RACE

#### *The Nationalist Struggle in Oudh*

By the end of June 1858 the war had practically been won by the British. One after another the nationalist strongholds had fallen—Cawnpore, Delhi, Lucknow, Jhansi, Kalpi, Bareilly and Gwalior. Yet curiously enough when all hope of success had vanished the war was prolonged for more than a year by the heroic resistance of the people of Oudh and by the remarkable skill of Tatyá Tope in organising guerilla warfare. The interest of the story therefore now centres round the nationalist struggle in Oudh and the guerilla warfare of Tatyá Tope.

Though British authority was re-established in Rohilkhand the nationalist forces mustered strong for the defence of Oudh and carried on the struggle for a long time. It was not till November 1859 that the remnants of the nationalist force surrendered in Oudh. In the course of this long spell of scattered fighting the British columns destroyed 1572 forts and captured 714 cannon—irrespective of those taken in battle.\* The struggle was severe and prolonged. The intensity of the struggle that was waged in Oudh, after the fall of Lucknow, can be gauged from the following comments of the British commander, Sir Hope Grant, who defeated some of the nationalist troops at Nawabgunj, about 18 miles from Lucknow: "I have seen many battles in India, and many brave fellows fighting with a determination to conquer or die, but I never witnessed anything more magnificent than

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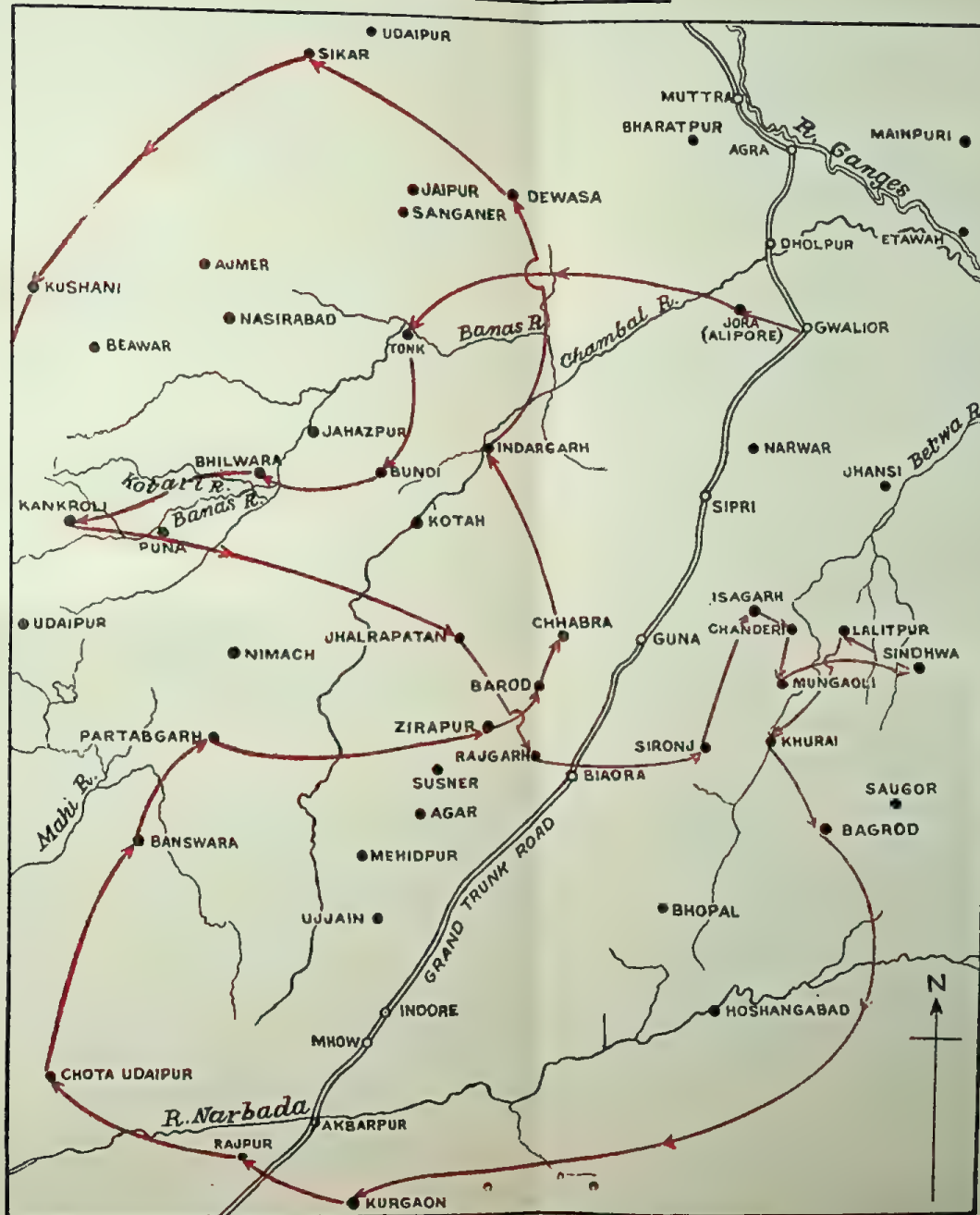
\* A. C. Taylor: *General Alex Taylor*, Vol. II, p. 138



TATYA'S MARATHON RACE

21 JUNE 1858 — 8 APRIL 1859

SCALE OF MILES





the conduct of these zemindarees.”\* High praise indeed but well deserved.

### *Tatya Tope's Marathon Race*

After the loss of Gwalior, Tatya Tope commenced “the marvellous series of operations,” which continued for ten months and which established his reputation as one of the greatest guerilla leaders of the world. He ran a thrilling race over hill and dale and though “one pack of hounds after another took up the hunt,” beaten he really was not. When the British columns failed to overtake him in this splendid race the British authorities seized him by a base trick, i.e. by holding out promises of reward to an erstwhile friend of Tatya Tope to betray his hiding place.

After the capture of Gwalior, Sir Hugh Rose left for Bombay to assume command of the Poona Division. The Central India Field Force was broken up, and a Gwalior Division was formed, the garrisons of Jhansi and Kalpi being included in it. Brigadier-General R. Napier assumed command of the Gwalior Division and the forces in Central India. These forces were distributed mainly at Gwalior, Jhansi, Sipri and Guna. A brigade of the Rajputana Field Force, with Headquarters at Nasirabad, was under Major-General H. G. Roberts; another brigade was at Nimach under Brigadier W. Parke. The third brigade (under Brigadier M. W. Smith) was however at Sipri. A brigade of the Bengal Army was at Agra under Brigadier St. G. D. Showers. The Malwa Division of the Bombay Army under Major-General J. Michel was at Mhow. Thus there were ranged around the area in which Tatya Tope was likely to move British forces at Gwalior, Jhansi, Sipri, Guna, Nasirabad, Nimach and Agra (with a detachment at Bharatpur). There were also other forces “round the outer ring of this girdle.” It seemed therefore that Tatya Tope

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\* Grant and Knolly: *Incidents in the Sepoy War*, (1873), p. 291

would not be able to escape from the net that was closing round him. Yet so extraordinary was his vitality that for more than nine months he outwitted and outmanoeuvred the British commanders.

A contemporary writer, who took part in the campaign, has recorded his impressions about Tatyá's guerilla warfare. "There were Divisions, Brigades, Regiments and Detachments of Troops, Regular and Irregular, commanded by officers of all ranks, the heavier the force the slower the pace, and therefore less chance of catching the swift-footed rebel chief, who carried no tents, no provisions; these he looted as he wanted them for consumption, and when his horses were worn out, left them on the road to die, and replaced them after the same manner, sometimes from our post stations, and sometimes by attacking our long lines of baggage and led horses. His Light Horse could hover round us like shadows, and always get away from our overworked Irregular or overweighted Regular Cavalry. Each fresh Commandant who took the field fancied he could catch Tatyá: prodigious marches were made, officers and men threw aside all baggage, even their tents, and accomplished upwards of forty miles daily—the rebels did fifty. The end was, our horses were all sore-backed, and the halt of a week or ten days rendered absolutely necessary. Then came a new aspirant for a C.B. and Tantia's head, who brought fresh troops and camels into the field. He perhaps, had not only to chase Tantia, but to keep clear of the other forces commanded by a senior in rank to himself. It was wonderful the amount of energy that was thrown into the pursuit, and the hundreds of dead camels strewn over every jungle track: roads were no object, or rivers either, to pursued or pursuers. On they went until dead beaten. Occasionally some one more fortunate than the rest had the luck to catch up the fugitives and cut up stragglers; but it was always in heavy jungle: they had the very best of information, and never trusted themselves to the open country when any force was near. We had the



very worst of information, even in the territories of professedly friendly Rajahs. The sympathy of the people was on their side: they appeared to have no difficulty in obtaining supplies, while our columns were sometimes much straitened for grain.”\*

### *Tatya Tope in the Role of a Robin Hood*

The same writer gives us interesting information about Tayta Tope in the role of a Robin Hood. “Tantia Topi was dependent on Velliatees, Bundelas, Bheels, and robbers for his infantry but they were good shots, and fought well in jungle, attired in green as backwoodsmen. Most of them were mounted on camels and ponies, the latter often shoeless and footsore, their feet bound up with rags to protect them from the rocks. They bivouacked in some deeply-wooded glen at night, and cooked their day’s provisions, and slept, but always placed watchful pickets, and seldom could be surprised, and thus were often lost to us for days together. He was beaten often, and as often reported utterly routed. This was a mistake: it was their custom to separate in numerous small bodies when attacked—it facilitated their escape; but they always had their trysting tree, and rallied in a few hours. In one instance they occupied the same encamping ground at night which one of our Regiments had left in the morning. Some of our best Indian Cavalry officers were in pursuit, with Irregular Horse Regiments, but could not catch this genius of flight. No one ever saw him even in the distance until Man Singh betrayed him to us.”†

### *A Bold Attempt to Reach Udaipur*

After the loss of Gwalior and his defeat at Jora Alipore on June 21, 1858 Tatya Tope, accompanied by Rao Sahib

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\* Sylvester, pp. 196-198

† Sylvester, pp. 198-199

and the Nawab of Banda, fled in a north-westerly direction, but was turned by a force sent from Agra by Brigadier Showers to cover Bharatpur. He then made a rapid move on Jaipur but was forestalled by Major-General Roberts. The latter set out at the head of a large force from Nasirabad on June 28, and by rapid marches reached about six miles from Jaipur while Tatya Tope was still sixty miles away. Thwarted in his attempt to seize Jaipur, Tatya Tope turned south to Tonk, where fortune favoured him. The Nawab of Tonk shut himself up in his fort and left outside a portion of his force with four guns to oppose Tatya Tope's troops. Instead of offering resistance they went over to the side of Tatya Tope. Thus reinforced Tatya Tope moved on to Bundi but the Maharao shut the gates of his walled town. Baffled in his attempt to seize Bundi, Tatya Tope crossed the Bundi hills by the Keena Pass in order to push on to Udaipur, where he had a strong party favouring his cause. It was a bold move. Meanwhile Roberts had sent a flying column under Lieutenant-Colonel Holmes to keep up the pursuit. Holmes followed on the tracks of Tatya Tope and found that he had crossed the Bundi hills by the Keena Pass. Abandoning the direct line of pursuit Holmes crossed the Bundi range by the Bundi Pass and reached Jahazpur on August 4 in order to intercept Tatya Tope's force. Here information was received that Tatya Tope was making his way towards Bhilwara. Meanwhile Roberts, who had marched westward to the Nimach-Nasirabad road, advanced towards Bhilwara and after a skirmish drove Tatya Tope towards the river Banas. Holmes now came up with his force and effected a junction with the main body of troops led by Roberts. Roberts now took up the pursuit. On August 13 he reached the town of Kankroli, situated at a distance of thirty-eight miles from Udaipur. Here Roberts got the information that Tatya Tope's force was in position on a rocky ridge on the right bank of the river Banas. Tatya Tope had selected a strong defensive position. The river flowed at the foot of the ridge along

the whole front of his position. The British troops had to approach this position across a plain, which was swept by Tatyá Tope's guns. They advanced across the plain in face of murderous fire, waded knee-deep through the river, and drove Tatyá Tope's troops from the ridge. Tatyá Tope suffered a reverse and sustained some losses but the majority of his nimble-footed troops escaped across the undulating country.

### *Finest Feat of Arms*

Tatyá Tope fled eastwards in order to cross the Chambal. He was followed by Roberts, who met Brigadier Parke, commanding the Nimach Brigade, on August 18, 1858 at Puna, not far from the Nimach-Nasirabad road. Roberts asked Parke to take up the pursuit. Tatyá Tope however proved too clever for Parke. When the latter reached the Chambal he found that Tatyá Tope had succeeded in crossing the river, which was rising rapidly. The rising of the Chambal prevented the pursuit of Tatyá Tope and therefore Parke returned to Nimach.

After crossing the Chambal, Tatyá Tope with splendid audacity plundered the large town of Jhalrapatan (35 miles distant), the capital of the Jhalwar State, whose ruler was friendly to the British. This was indeed a fine feat of arms for almost in sight of the British columns he coolly compelled the payment of large 'fines in money and stores,' and carried off about thirty cannon. The significance of this success was great indeed. Owing to the rise of the Chambal, Tatyá Tope felt assured that he would not be pursued for some time by Roberts and Parke. He could therefore plan his operations. His strategy now became clearer—to make a dash to Indore (only about 150 miles distant), rally its people to his side, and then cross into the Deccan to proclaim the Nana as the Peshwa in the land of the Marathas.

### *A Splendid Achievement*

Early in September 1858 Tatya Tope left Jhalrapatan and marched south-east to Rajgarh in order to carry out his plan of rallying the people of Indore to his side. His plan was however frustrated for Major-General Michel, who was commanding in Malwa, had foreseen this movement. He acted with energy. He despatched a small force under Colonel Lockhart to cover Ujjain, a town north of Indore. Lockheart moved northwards to Susner, thirty miles west of Rajgarh, and there awaited a reinforcement from Mhow under Colonel Hope, for he did not consider himself strong enough to attack Tatya Tope's troops. The forces of Hope and Lockhart effected a junction at Nalkhera, ten miles south-east of Susner. On September 13, Major-General Michel arrived at Nalkhera and assumed command of the forces.\* After a tiresome march Michel came upon Tatya Tope's force encamped near the walled town of Rajgarh. The troops were tired and therefore Michel waited till the morning to launch the attack. But early in the morning he found to his surprise that Tatya Tope's troops had disappeared. He followed on their tracks and found that they had taken up position at Biaora. A British cavalry patrol, which moved forward to reconnoitre the position, was chased by a swarm of horsemen. The British infantry and artillery now came up in support of the cavalry. An artillery duel lasted for some time. Then the British infantry led the attack. Tatya Tope's troops gave way and fled. The pursuit was continued and the whole of Tatya Tope's park of twenty-seven guns was captured. Tatya Tope fled eastwards to the valley of the Betwa. At Sironj he found four guns and rested for a week, for the monsoon had set in preventing the British columns from carrying on the pursuit. Then Tatya Tope marched northwards to Isagarh, which he stormed and plundered, taking five more guns.

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\* At the end of August 1858 Major-General Michel had succeeded Major-General Roberts in command of the Rajputana Field Force



Here his force split up; Tatya Tope marched on Chanderi while Rao Sahib advanced towards Lalitpur. Tatya Tope was hopeful that Sindhia's troops garrisoning Chanderi would join him. But they did nothing of the kind. After trying in vain to persuade them to come over to his side Tatya Tope moved twenty miles southwards to Mangaoli on the left bank of the river Betwa. Here he was overtaken by Michel and defeated on October 10, 1858. Tatya Tope fled across the Betwa to Lalitpur, where he found Rao Sahib. The latter marched south-east about fifteen miles to Sindhwa. Michel however had anticipated this move; so he hurried after Rao Sahib and defeated him on October 19, 1858. Rao Sahib rejoined Tatya Tope at Lalitpur, when they marched in a north-westerly direction in order to cross the Betwa. But they found that the ford was guarded by Colonel Liddell with a small force from Jhansi. Finding that he was being surrounded on all sides by the British columns Tatya Tope resolved to cross the Narbada. He fled towards Khurai, where his rear-guard was defeated by Michel. Tatya Tope, with the main body, escaped towards the Narbada. Lieutenant-Colonel Beecher, who was marching from the Deccan to join Michel with a newly raised cavalry regiment tried in vain to check his advance. Tatya Tope pushed on and crossed the Narbada into the Nagpur territory at a point forty five miles above Hoshangabad.

He had baffled his pursuers and had succeeded in crossing the Narbada into the Nagpur territory. It was a splendid achievement indeed. The arrival of Tatya Tope's force in the Nagpur territory caused widespread alarm. Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of the Bombay Presidency felt perturbed. The alarm even spread to the Madras Presidency. Tatya Tope was however not in a position to exploit this advantageous situation for as soon as the British authorities recovered from their panic they took immediate steps to nip the evil in the bud.

***Bold Bid to Seize Baroda***

After crossing the Narbada, Tatya Tope pushed on to Multai, but the presence of the British troops in Nagpur forbade a further advance in that direction. He fled along the valley of the Tapti in the vain hope of finding in that wild country an outlet through which he might pass to the south. Anticipated at all points, he gave up the idea of marching to the Deccan and resolved to go instead to Baroda, the capital of the Baroda State (the territories of the Gaekwar). Baroda was garrisoned by only one company of Europeans and two native regiments, besides the troops of the Gaekwar. Tatya Tope was quite hopeful of winning over to his side the native regiments, and the Gaekwar's troops. Hence his plan was to give the slip to the pursuing columns and to push on to Baroda. His plan however miscarried because he found it difficult to shake off his pursuers. On November 19 he reached Kurgaon, where a detachment of Holkar's troops (two troops of cavalry, a company of infantry and two guns) joined him. Thus reinforced he turned to the north-west in order to recross the Narbada and march on Baroda.

Meanwhile detachments were sent out from Mhow to watch the fords over the Narbada. One of these detachments under Major Sutherland crossed the Narbada at Akbarpur and overtook Tatya Tope at Rajpur on November 25, 1858. In the skirmish that followed Tatya Tope lost two guns but escaped with his force. Relieved of his guns, Tatya Tope was able to retreat with greater celerity and he completely outwitted Sutherland. When the latter, following on his tracks, arrived next evening on the bank of the Narbada he found that Tatya Tope's troops were encamped on the opposite side. Sutherland did not dare to cross the river in face of an enemy superior in numbers and was content to halt south of the Narbada.

Having very cleverly placed the Narbada between himself and his pursuers Tatya Tope marched with all rapidity •

towards Baroda. Lured by the prospects of seizing Baroda, Taty Tope displayed great energy; he pushed on rapidly to Chota Udaipur. Baroda—the tempting prize—lay only fifty miles away. Fortune however did not favour him for the pursuers were gaining fast on him.

General Michel, after defeating Taty Tope at Khurai, had reached Hoshangabad on November 7, where he had been joined by Brigadier Parke. He had then marched to Charwa, where on learning about Taty Tope's movements, he despatched Parke with a flying column to carry on the pursuit while he himself returned to Mhow. Covering 241 miles in nine days, Parke overtook and defeated Taty Tope at Chota Udaipur on December 1, 1858. Taty Tope fled to the Banswara jungle, at the southern extremity of Rajputana.

### *Escape From the Net*

The situation now facing Taty Tope was none too pleasant. His ally, the Nawab of Banda, had left him in November 1858 and had surrendered to the British Government. Taty Tope and Rao Sahib were left alone to carry on the struggle. The situation facing the two leaders was indeed desperate. The net was fast closing around them. The troops of Robert's division were guarding the paths leading from Banswara to the west. A force (under Major Rocke) from Nimach protected the passes to the north and north-west. The passes leading to the east and to the south-east were guarded by a column (under Colonel Somerset) sent from Mhow. On the south the line of the Narbada was well guarded. Thus the cordon round Taty Tope and Rao Sahib was well drawn. But such was their robust faith in their cause that they did not despair of escaping from this iron ring of outposts. Taty Tope remained in hiding in the Banswara jungle for some time and then marched towards Partabgarh. On December 25, 1858 as he neared Partabgarh he encountered a column under Major Rocke. After a short skirmish Taty Tope

escaped to Zirapur, where on December 29, he was overtaken by a column from Mhow under Lieutenant-Colonel Benson. A skirmish ensued but the British Commander was not strong enough to defeat Tatya Tope. The latter marched to Chhabra, where he was overtaken on December 31, by another Mhow column under Brigadier Somerset. Another ineffective skirmish ensued and Tatya Tope escaped to Nahargarh, where he was joined by Man Singh. When they reached the Chambal, Man Singh left Tatya Tope and Rao Sahib. They however pushed on to Indargarh, where they were joined by Prince Feroze Shah on January 13, 1859.

### *The Allies of Tatya Tope*

The story now reverts to the activities of these two leaders—Man Singh and Prince Feroze Shah. Man Singh was a Rajput chief, whose jagir of Narwar lay forty-four miles south of Gwalior. He quarrelled with Sindhia and seized the fort of Paori, twenty miles north of Sipri. Nationalist troops gathered from far and near under his banner. His force numbered 4,000 men of whom 700 were sepoys. Brigadier Smith marched at the head of a large force from Sipri and captured the fort of Paori on August 22, 1858. Man Singh fled but was pursued by a flying column under Lieutenant-Colonel Robertson. The latter defeated a part of the force of Man Singh at Bijepur on September 5, 1858. Man Singh however escaped with part of his force and joined Tatya Tope near Nahargarh at the end of December 1858.

Prince Feroze Shah's escape from Oudh was more dramatic. After crossing the Ganges on December 7, 1858 he successfully baffled pursuit until Brigadier-General Robert Napier overtook and defeated him at Ranod, on the right bank of the Sindh, on December 17. Prince Feroze Shah escaped with a large part of his force and joined Tatya Tope at Indargarh early in January 1859.



### *The Last Fling at Fortune*

Although Tatya Tope was encouraged by these reinforcements he found that the situation was steadily deteriorating. His force at Indargarh was ringed round by British columns. He was hemmed in by Napier on the north and north-east. Brigadier Showers, who had moved with a flying column from Agra to Kushalgarh, was on the north-west. Brigadier Somerset was at Barod on the east. Brigadier Smith was on the south-east. Major-General Michel was on the south. Brigadier Honner, commanding the Nasirabad Brigade, was on the south-west and west. The net was closing around Tatya Tope and there seemed to be no way of escape. But he was never despondent. He resolved to make a second dash for Jaipur. Accompanied by Rao Sahib and Prince Feroze Shah he reached on January 13, 1859 the town of Dewasa, about 35 miles east of Jaipur. Showers marched against him and defeated him at Dewasa on January 14. He fled to Sikar, where on January 21 he was overtaken and defeated by a column (under Lieutenant-Colonel Holmes). Complete demoralisation now set in. Tatya Tope hid himself in the Paron forests while Rao Sahib, Prince Feroze Shah and their followers reached Kushani, about eighty miles east of Jodhpur, on February 10, 1859. Honner's column from Guna dispersed them. Rao Sahib and Prince Feroze Shah fled to the Sironj jungle. Meanwhile the British authorities tried a base trick to capture Tatya Tope. They induced Man Singh (who had already surrendered) by the offer of a tempting reward to betray the hiding place of Tatya Tope. When Tatya Tope was thus arrested on April 8, 1859 he cast a withering look of contempt on Man Singh, his erstwhile friend and ally.

### *Trial and Execution of Tatya Tope*

On April 15, 1859 Tatya Tope was tried by court-martial at Sipri. He was charged with having been in rebellion and having waged war against the British Government. No accusation of murder was brought against him. In his

defence he pleaded, "I only obeyed, in all things that I did, my master's orders, the Nana's orders, up to the capture of Kalpi, and afterwards those of Rao Sahib. I have nothing to state, except that I have had nothing to do with the murder of any European men, women, or children; neither had I at any time given orders for any one to be hanged."\* In short, he admitted that he had resisted the dominant race, but had fought with fair weapons. This straightforward defence did not avail him, and he was sentenced to death. He was hanged on April 18, 1859.

The justice of the sentence has been questioned for the majority of the population regard the rising of 1857 as a national contest and not as a rebellion.† Colonel Malleson in fact doubted very much whether a reflecting posterity would confirm the justice of the sentence. His main argument was that Tatya Tope could not be branded as a rebel for he was no born servant of the English rule. At the time of his birth his master, Baji Rao II, was the independent ruler of a large portion of Western India. Consequently he lay under no obligation to serve loyally the race which had robbed his master. Colonel Malleson was not content with merely condemning the iniquity of the judicial sentence. He made an analogy between Tatya and Hofer, the patriot of Tyrol, who was unjustly executed by Napoleon. Both Tatya and Hofer were national heroes for they represented the struggle of the subject race to rid their country of the foreign yoke. Hofer came to be regarded as a great national hero by the Europeans. Colonel Malleson wondered whether Tatya too might not be the hero of the people living in the valleys of the Chambal, the Narbada and the Parbati. It is not only the people living in the valleys of the Chambel, the Narbada and the

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\* Statement of Tantia Topi dated April 10, 1859; Appendix XVII, *The Revolt in Central India*, Army Headquarters (Simla 1908)

† G. A. Furse: *The Art of Marching* (London 1901), p. 499

Parbati, but the people throughout the length and breadth of the country who regard Tatya Tope as their hero. Tatya Tope is in fact one of the greatest national heroes of India.

### *Tatya Tope's Achievements*

Tatya Tope was one of the most remarkable leaders India has ever produced. His plans — Napoleonic in conception though not in execution — reveal his strategic insight. Two of his plans — to capture the great rock fortress of Gwalior and to make a dash to the Deccan — were admirably conceived and testify to his ability as a great strategist. Apart from these audacious schemes — one of which was successfully carried out — his strategy was governed by one important consideration, to destroy the enemy base and to disrupt his line of communication. He consistently followed this strategy — to recapture Cawnpore (the enemy base) and to threaten to cut off the enemy line of communication. He persisted in this policy and gave it up only when he was defeated at Cawnpore on December 6, 1857.

Tatya Tope was not only a great strategist but he was also a skilful tactician. The chief basis of his tactics was to preserve his army intact and not to risk it in a single decisive battle. Again and again by his skilful tactics he extricated his forces from untenable positions. By a series of engagements skilfully executed he checked Havelock's advance long enough to enable him to extricate his force safely from Cawnpore on July 16, 1857. At the battle of Cawnpore (December 6, 1857) and the battle of the Betwa (April 1, 1858) he showed masterly skill in extricating his forces. In fact Tatya Tope's genius lay not so much in fighting pitched battles as in carrying out successful rear-guard actions to cover the retreat of his troops.

Tatya Tope was a gifted general. He possessed initiative; thus while Sir Hugh Rose's force was engaged in a grim struggle at Kalpi he carried out the audacious plan of

seizing Gwalior. He also possessed the gift of seizing an opportunity for launching counter-attacks. Thus while Sir Colin Campbell's force was engaged in the operations in Lucknow in November 1857 he launched that famous counter-attack from Kalpi which almost led to the annihilation of the British force in Cawnpore.

But with all his admirable qualities—sound strategy, skilful tactics, bold initiative and daring counter-strokes—Tatya Tope lacked one gift, the physical courage to lead the men to the cannon's mouth. This weakness proved to be one of the most important causes of his failure. Instead of being in the thick of the fighting he preferred—as at the battle of the Betwa—to be in command of the second line of defence. Thus he failed to lead his troops to victory. He failed to carry off the palm of victory, the marvellous art of strategy before which all bow. But though he lacked physical courage he possessed in abundance moral courage—the will to fight. He possessed in a remarkable degree the fighting spirit for he refused to be beaten. He carried on the struggle to the bitter end. He never let himself be cast down by reverses. He was always hopeful that the noble cause for which he was fighting would triumph. It was this robust faith in the righteousness of his cause that sustained him in all his defeats and misfortunes. He had undoubtedly the gifts of a great commander—brain, character and stolid imperturbability.

Tatya Tope's fame however rests more on his achievements as a guerilla leader than on his triumphs as a great commander. Tatya Tope is undoubtedly one of the most famous guerilla leaders of the world. His marches were wonderful and he easily outdistanced his pursuers. The splendid marches made by the British commanders in his pursuit are the best testimony to his ability as a guerilla leader. Brigadier Parke marched 240 miles in nine days. Brigadier Somerset covered 230 miles in nine days and, again, 70 miles in fifty-eight hours. Colonel Holmes tra-



versed 54 miles of sandy desert in about twenty-four hours. Brigadier Honner marched 145 miles in four days.\* But such was the remarkable resourcefulness of Tatyā Tope that he completely outwitted and outmanoeuvred the British commanders. Like a wily fox he would sometimes double back on his tracks to put his pursuers on a false scent. On other occasions he would take to unfrequented paths, which led up the cliffs or wound down to the ravines below. His mobility, no less than his ingenuity and resourcefulness, was remarkable. He easily outdistanced his pursuers. His men held to him through thick and thin. Undaunted by the difficulties, which at times seemed almost unsurmountable, his little band of courageous followers sped on and on through thick jungles, deep ravines and arid deserts. It was a remarkable exploit of courage, heroism and endurance.

The assessment of the character and achievements of Tatyā Tope by the British historians is on the whole fair and judicious. Sir George Forrest considered Tatyā Tope to be the ablest nationalist leader for he possessed remarkable powers of organisation. But although he had all the ability to plan a good scheme he had not the tenacity to carry it out.† Colonel Malleson paid tribute to Tatyā Tope for his wonderful marches, for his ability to select suitable defensive positions and for his marvellous faculty for localities. He however pointed out some of his shortcomings—the lack of ability to detect the weak points of his enemy and the lack of courage to expose himself in action‡ Percy Cross Standing not only included Tatyā Tope amongst the famous guerilla leaders of the world, but he also bestowed on him the highest praise by remarking that he “was by far the biggest brain produced on the native side by the Mutiny

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\* Malleson: **The Indian Mutiny of 1857** (London 1912), p. 397

† G. W. Forrest: **History of the Indian Mutiny** (1902-4), Vol III, pp. Xiii-Xiv

‡ Kaye and Malleson, V. pp. 266-267

of 1857-58. A few more like him and India had inevitably been wrested from the English."\* He further remarked that even if it be admitted that Tatya Tope lacked physical courage he undoubtedly possessed all the essential qualities of a great general—he had the power of planning, devising and controlling, the unsurpassable gift of concentration, and above all the high quality of never knowing when he was beaten.

Whatever the tactical mistakes committed by Tatya Tope and whatever his failings as a general, it is undeniable that he was a great leader for he possessed this in common with the other great leaders of the world, an unconquerable spirit. He had unshakable faith in the righteousness of his cause, and he never despaired of its ultimate triumph. He was a valiant fighter in the noble cause of the freedom of the country. The people of India are proud of this gifted leader, who admirably served his Motherland in the hour of her trial.

Although India's War of Independence did not lead to the triumph of the nationalist cause Tatya's mission was not a failure for the torch of freedom that was lit by Tatya Tope and the Rani of Jhansi was handed down from generation to generation until the country achieved its independence on August 15, 1947.

*"For freedom's battle once begun,  
Bequeath'd by bleeding sire to son,  
Though baffled oft, is ever won."*

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\* Percy Cross Standing: **Guerilla Leaders of the World**

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